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## Control without Occupation

### The missed lesson of effective air operations in irregular conflict from the RAF's air control scheme

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**King's College London**

**Control without Occupation:  
The missed lesson of effective air operations in  
irregular conflict from the RAF's air control scheme**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Defence Studies**

7 Aug 2016

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## **GLOSSARY**

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| AFHRA    | Air Force Historical Research Agency (US)                     |
| AHB      | Air Historical Branch (UK)                                    |
| AIR      | Air Ministry Papers   |
| Air Cdre | Air Commodore (1-star)  |
| AC       | Aircraftsman (RAF enlisted rank)                              |
| ACM      | Air Chief Marshal (4-stars)                                   |
| AM       | Air Marshal (3-stars)   |
| AVM      | Air Vice Marshal (2-stars)                                    |
| Brig     | Brigadier (1-star, UK)  |
| Brig Gen | Brigadier General (1-star, US)                                |
| CAB      | Cabinet Papers  |
| CAS      | Chief of the Air Staff (UK)                                   |
| CHAR     | Chartwell Paper (Churchill's papers from before 27 July 1945) |
| CO       | Colonial Office Papers  |
| CP       | Cabinet Papers  |
| DoD      | Department of Defense (US)                                    |
| FO       | Foreign Office Papers   |
| Gen      | General (4-stars)   |
| IWM      | Imperial War Museum   |
| LHA      | Liddell Hart Archives at King's College London                |
| Lt Gen   | Lieutenant General (3-stars)                                  |
| Maj Gen  | Major General (2-stars)                                       |
| MRAF     | Marshal of the Royal Air Force                                |
| NATO     | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation                            |
| RCAS     | Royal Central Asia Society                                    |
| ROE      | rules of engagement   |
| RUSI     | Royal United Service Institution                              |
| SF       | Special Forces  |
| SOF      | Special Operations Forces                                     |
| Sqn      | Squadron  |
| SSO      | Special Service Officer                                       |
| TNA      | The National Archives (UK)                                    |
| TREA     | Treasury Papers   |
| USII     | United Service Institute of India                             |
| WC       | War Cabinet Papers  |

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

In January 1999, I took off my flight suit and changed my role from practitioner to educator and researcher. I was afforded the privilege of teaching the soldiers, sailors, and airmen of NATO about special operations, air power, and the interdependence of the two. Along the way, I was honoured to be included in an amazingly talented and discerning group of airmen from the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Italy, and the United States who drafted, tested, and promulgated the first NATO doctrines and theories for special air warfare and the appropriate role for air power in conflicts of an irregular nature.

Like so many others who have attempted the process of a PhD thesis, I could not have completed this journey of learning on my own. I am grateful for all who listened and challenged me as I formed my ideas, who encouraged and held me up when it all seemed ‘just too hard’, and who saw the value of this research. Thank you.

There are two, however, without whom this thesis would have been consigned to the recycle bin. Dr David Jordan, Senior Lecturer in the Defence Studies Programme at King’s College London, agreed to become my supervisor at a time when the thesis and my thinking about air power and irregular warfare had become ‘lost in the clouds’. Like all great instructor pilots, he guided, nudged, and when necessary, re-focused my efforts to get me and the thesis back on course and on glide path.

It is Group Captain (RAF, retired) Graham Thwaites, though, who is most responsible for this thesis being attempted in the first place and whose influence—friendship, support, and the occasional ‘kick in the trousers’, kept me going during some especially trying episodes. Without his vision, counsel and encouragement, this thesis would not have been attempted and likely would have never been completed.

The one who deserves the greatest credit though, is my wife. Kathy was the one who told me to ‘go for it’ when the opportunity to attempt the PhD presented itself. She suffered through the separations caused by the year in residence at King’s and my research trips, and also the years of missed evenings and weekends because I was at my desk writing. She was always there, cheering, pushing, and supporting me through this effort. Kathy, I thank you and I love you.

At the end of the day, however, this thesis is the result of my own work and nothing herein is the result of collaboration or contribution of others except where specifically annotated in the text or citations.

## **ABSTRACT**

Air power is the asymmetric advantage Western forces have enjoyed almost since the beginnings of military aviation. Through two World Wars, Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, and NATO's 'small wars' in the Balkans and North Africa, the aeroplane and air power have been decisive elements in military operations. What have largely been missed however have been the preventative capabilities of air power, what Kipling observed as the possibility of social control that may serve to avoid rebellion or insurgency.

This thesis will consider the application of air power to conflicts of irregular character, but focusing on pre-conflict and preventative applications of air power. Modern airmen and air power analysts have looked to the RAF's air control scheme between the two World Wars seeking 'proof' that air forces offered a credible and low-cost means of countering irregular adversaries without placing large numbers of soldiers in harm's way. These analysts have typically drawn parallels from the inter-war period to air policing operations in Iraq, the Balkans, Libya, and others—superficial comparisons at best.

The premise of this thesis is that while there are some lessons to be learned from the RAF's air control experiences during the inter-war period, modern airmen have not made a critical analysis of the RAF's air control scheme and have come to incorrect conclusions in order to meet pre-conceived notions. Although the RAF did bomb recalcitrant tribes in order to compel obedience, aerial bombing was only one, albeit the most visible, part of the air control scheme. By the 1930s, air power had evolved to become a more subtle and nuanced tool for tribal control.

What made air control 'work' was an innovation that has been missed, downplayed, or ignored by most historians and analysts of the Middle East air control experience. The RAF created a unique, air-minded manifestation of the colonial control officers that the Army had long employed in imperial policing duties. These Air Force Special Service Officers (SSOs) were acculturated airmen embedded with the local populations to provide situational awareness, intelligence, and communications in places too dangerous or isolated for civilian tribal control officers. Where the RAF was responsible for imperial policing, the SSOs often made it possible for colonial authorities to address potential problems in the normal course of civil administration. And, when air operations were required, these embedded airmen were trained and equipped to control and assess the application of air-delivered effects—an early manifestation of effects-based operations.

The bombing of recalcitrant tribes has been the element of the RAF's air control scheme that modern analysts have usually seized upon; mostly because bombing is most congruent with what they perceive as air power's primary conventional role—attack. The historiography of air control has tended to neglect the non-kinetic and often preventative influencing aspects of air power. This thesis shows that air control was more subtle and nuanced, rather than the blunt instrument most commentators have suggested. In those instances where subtle applications of air power were effective at maintaining acceptable levels of security and stability in Britain's colonies and Mandates, there were acculturated airmen embedded among the local populations, i.e., the right boots on the ground, providing the catalysts and enablers for effective air and civil integration.

# Chapter One

## Introduction

*It must be remembered that from the ground every inhabitant of a native village is under the impression that the occupant of an aeroplane is actually looking at him, and the frequent appearance of aircraft apparently overhead will do much towards establishing the impression that all their movements are being watched and reported.*<sup>1</sup>

*Royal Air Force Operations Manual, 1922*

Control without occupation, or sending a machine instead of a man, has remained a tantalising concept in warfare.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the First Gulf War (Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, 1989 – 1990) airmen were not subtle in their advocacy of air power as a low cost means of addressing the complexity and ‘messiness’ of modern warfare.<sup>3</sup> Tony Mason, in *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal*, in order to initiate the discussion, offered that after Desert Storm ‘air power proved that it could substitute for land power’.<sup>4</sup> Mason’s appraisal of air power’s utility in future warfare, that it was ‘likely to become a favourite instrument in optional warfare, minimising friendly casualties, providing a wide range of offensive options’ seemed prescient at the time, especially through the 1990s and during the

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<sup>1</sup> C.D. 22, No. 805, *Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*, (London: Air Ministry, July 1922), p. 133. The quote is also in the earlier C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, Mar 1920, found in TNA AIR 5/168 (June 1921), p. 4. This ‘principle of inspection’, or the idea of shaping behaviour through perceived constant surveillance, may have origins in the writings of Jeremy Bentham, an 18<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher, who proposed a panoptic prison in 1787. *The Bentham Project*, University College London, found at [www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/who/panopticon](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/who/panopticon).

<sup>2</sup> TNA AIR 5/262, Air Ministry, *Memorandum on the working of air control in Iraq*, undated (circa Feb 1927), p. 1; also in TNA AIR 5/170, C.D. 72, Air Staff Memorandum (ASM) 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, 24 Mar 1930, p. 4. ‘Control without occupation’ was also a chapter title in ASM 46, pp. 3 – 5.

<sup>3</sup> During the mid-1990s, the USAF’s Air University considered the concept of ‘air occupation’ and ‘air policing’ while examining peace-enforcement and peace-making operations. This emphasis manifested in student papers from the different colleges and also in the USAF’s professional journal. See for example, George R. Gagnon, *Air Control: Strategy for a Smaller United States Air Force*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: School of Advanced Airpower Studies, 1993); Jeffery R. Barnett, ‘Defeating Insurgents with Technology’, *Airpower Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, (Summer 1996); George Kramlinger, *Sustained Coercive Air Presence*, School of Advanced Air & Space Studies, 1997; Marc Dippold, ‘Air Occupation: Asking the Right Questions’, *Airpower Journal*, vol. 11, no. 4, (Winter 1997); Richard Walker, *Facing the Future: A Doctrine for Air Control in Limited Conflicts*, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, 1998; and Air Command & Staff College video, *Col John A Warden III on Air Occupation*, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal*, (London: Brassey’s, Ltd., 1994), p. 166.



opening rounds of the post-9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>5</sup> It should not be a surprise that British Army doctrine from 2001, reflecting the Pollyanna-like optimism of the ‘revolution in military affairs’, suggested that technological advances in surveillance, targeting, and precision strike offered the possibility ‘to reintroduce an era where air power could again have a major role’ in counter-insurgency operations, as it had had between the World Wars.<sup>6</sup> By 2009 though, the British Army had reversed its position and relegated air power to ‘the *supporting component* [emphasis in original] within a wider counterinsurgency approach’.<sup>7</sup> Historians Thomas Keaney and Eliot Cohen, in their analysis of the punitive air operations conducted during the 1990s observed that politicians had come to believe they could ‘titrate doses of air power in a way that they cannot do with ground combat’.<sup>8</sup> Carl Builder, an air power analyst with RAND Corporation, went so far as to suggest that air forces had a requirement to offer alternative, independent, air-centric means for feeding, supplying, rescuing, policing, and punishing adversaries during crises and lesser conflicts, without committing people to the ground.<sup>9</sup>

A decade later, as part of the rather heated debate over appropriate responses to the irregular conflicts on-going in Iraq and Afghanistan, air power analyst Phillip Meilinger suggested that the United States should adopt a ‘new’ air-centric approach to address the current spate of joint counter-insurgency operations. He and other thoughtful, professional,

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<sup>5</sup> Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal*, p. 244. Andrew Mumford reinforces Mason’s point by noting there are some ‘significant constants’ in the application of air power in irregular conflicts—politicians will use air power as a way to quickly demonstrate their decisiveness and air power offers a relatively inexpensive means of responding in terms of forces, finances, and casualties, in ‘Unnecessary or unsung? The utilisation of airpower in Britain’s colonial counterinsurgencies’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 20, nos. 3-4, (Sep – Dec 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Army Field Manual, vol. 1, pt. 10, *Counter-Insurgency Operations (Strategic and Operational Guidelines)*, (London: Ministry of Defence, July 2001), p. B-8-26.

<sup>7</sup> British Army Field Manual, vol. 1, pt. 10, *Countering Insurgency*, (Warminster, UK: Land Warfare Centre, Oct 2009), p. CS 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Revolution in Warfare? Air Power in the Persian Gulf*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), p. 213. This is the authors’ revised edition of the *Gulf War Air Power Summary Report*, originally published by the US Government Printing Office in 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Carl H. Builder and Theodore W. Karasik, *Organizing, Training, and Equipping the Air Force for Crises and Lesser Conflicts*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1995), p. 86.

and dedicated airmen such as Major General Allen Peck from the USAF Doctrine Center and Major General Charles Dunlap from HQ USAF suggested that the ground-centric approach being applied to those conflicts was two-dimensional, prohibitively costly, and misinformed with regards to the actual and potential contributions of air power in small wars.<sup>10</sup> Meilinger and others' assertions of air power's under-appreciated value in irregular conflict echoed arguments that had been made by British airmen in the 1920s and 30s as they advocated for and later defended their use of air power to control the frontier regions of the empire, i.e., that punitive expeditions by battalions of soldiers to police the empire, colloquially known at the time as 'burn and scuttle', were crude, time-consuming, and extremely costly from both a fiscal and resourcing perspective, plus they led to unnecessary casualties on both sides.<sup>11</sup> David Ian Hall noted that in the colonies, protectorates, and Mandates stretching from north-eastern Africa through the Middle-East to north-western India, air power had offered Britain 'an effective and inexpensive solution to the seemingly intractable problems of imperial security', a claim airmen would be similarly making 70 years later when seeking approaches to deal with irregular conflicts in the same regions.<sup>12</sup> An Air Ministry note from the early 1920s reported,

The military [Army] method of subduing a tribe has been to send an expedition into their country, to burn their villages, destroy their crops, carry away their buried

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<sup>10</sup> Maj Gen Allen Peck, at the time the commander of the US Air Force Doctrine Center, observed that the new Army-Marine Corps doctrine 'reflected "a very two-dimensional view of how to fight a counterinsurgency"' *Air Force*, vol. 90, no. 3, (Mar 2007), p. 15; see also Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., 'Making Revolutionary Change: Airpower in COIN Today', *Parameters*, Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, (Summer 2008), p. 53. Interestingly, Army colonel Gian Gentile admonished his Service in the Army's professional journal to 'listen closely to what he [Dunlap] has to say' about the shortcomings of the new counter-insurgency doctrine, 'Listen to the Airman', *Military Review*, (Mar/Apr 2008), p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> Sir John C. Slessor, *Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections*, (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 54. See also J.A. Chamier, 'The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons,' *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, Vol. 66, No. 462, (May 1921), pp. 206 – 208; C.J. Mackay, 'The Influence in the Future of Aircraft Upon Problems of Imperial Defence', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 57, no. 466, (May 1922), pp. 298 – 299; R.H. Peck, 'Aircraft in Small Wars', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 73, no. 491, (May 1928), pp. 539 – 540; A.P.C. Hannay, 'Empire Air Policy', *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4, (Oct 1930), p. 644.

<sup>12</sup> David Ian Hall, 'Review of *Air Power and Colonial Control*, by David Omissi', *20<sup>th</sup> Century British History*, vol. 3, no. 2, (1992), p. 214.

supplies of grain and round up their flocks. The inevitable result is that a large proportion of men, women, and children perish from starvation and exposure. ... The moral effect of aerial bombardment may be unpleasant but they are surely less human [sic] than the older method. ... Another aspect of an aerial offensive, particularly one directed against a semi-savage enemy is that it is productive of far less loss of life to the attackers as well as the attacked. Is the mental anguish of our women folk whose sons, husbands, and breadwinners are engaged in fighting unscrupulous savages, who give no quarter and who will mutilate the dead, of no account? A frontier expedition involves much suffering at home.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, and also echoing sentiments from the inter-war period, the coalition ground commander in Afghanistan from 2006 – 2007 gave high marks to air power's contributions and its effectiveness in reducing the number of soldiers on the ground. But similar to the soldiers of the 1920s and 30s, he stopped short of claiming an independent role for air power in irregular warfare.<sup>14</sup> T.R. Moreman noted that during the inter-war period the Army recommended air transport operations become a regular feature of tribal control operations on the North-West Frontier of India in order that land forces might increase their tactical mobility, reduce the numbers of pack animals required, and remove the need to protect lines of communication.<sup>15</sup> Although Tony Mason suggested in 1994 that the need for air power zealotry was over,<sup>16</sup> extended counter-insurgency operations in two theatres of operation since 2001 have re-ignited parochial arguments as to air power's appropriate roles in irregular warfare. The unhelpful and sometimes ill-mannered debate devolved into a land-centric, 'boots on the ground' camp against an air-centric, 'air power advantage' camp.<sup>17</sup> Modern air

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<sup>13</sup> TNA AIR 9/7, Air Staff Note 12, *Effects likely to be produced by intensive aerial bombing of semi-civilised people*, (undated, circa 1922), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Lt Gen Karl Eikenberry, the commander of Combined Forces Command Afghanistan, 2005 – 2007, noted that air power enabled a 90% reduction in the number of troops required for joint military operations in Afghanistan. *NATO's Future Joint Air & Space Power*, (Kalkar, GE: Joint Air Power Competence Centre, Apr 2008), p. 4. Also referenced in Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 0-30, *UK Air and Space Doctrine*, (Shrivenham, UK: Ministry of Defence Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, July 2013), p. 4-6.

<sup>15</sup> T.R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849 – 1947*, (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1998), p. 167.

<sup>16</sup> Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal*, pp. 273 – 75.

<sup>17</sup> Among the articles suggesting the US Army had developed a parochial, land-centric, and high-risk doctrine for counter-insurgency that ignored America's traditional air power advantage were Dunlap's 'America's

power advocates often attempted to draw parallels with Britain's imperial policing experiences in the Middle East and South Asia nine decades earlier as evidence of modern air power's ability to go it alone in irregular conflicts.<sup>18</sup> While similarities to the earlier conflicts in the Middle East and South-West Asia may be found due to the the locations and populations, 'Unhealthy generalisations', said Peter Gray, '... have been made to draw modern parallels where none exist'.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the previous researchers and analysts who have examined the historiography of the RAF's air control scheme usually did so with a technological perspective, most often focusing on aeroplanes' abilities to overfly obstacles, range the depth and breadth of the battlespace, observe, report, and bomb nearly at will, especially in a low-threat environment, and in the process induce behaviours from recalcitrant locals. Their optimistic conclusions usually tended towards offering the 1920's air control scheme as 'proof' of air power's ability to 'go it alone' in conflicts of an irregular nature.<sup>20</sup> While aeroplanes admittedly were the most visible part of the air control scheme, technology-focused researchers usually neglected to mention that the squadrons were reinforced by armoured car companies, indigenous paramilitary forces, local police, and on occasion Army battalions. Where the air control scheme was deemed most successful one sees evidence of effective integration of air forces, ground forces, the police, and political (colonial administration) elements. This aspect of the historiography has been understudied which is a shame because as historian Richard Hallion

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asymmetric advantage', *Armed Forces Journal*, (Sep 2006); 'Air-Minded Considerations for Joint Counterinsurgency Doctrine', *Air & Space Power Journal*, (Winter 2007), pp. 63 – 74, and *Shortchanging the Joint Fight: An Airman's Perspective of FM 3-24 and the Case for Developing Truly Joint COIN Doctrine*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Airpower Research Institute, 2008). Others with similar perspectives include Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency*, (2013), and Rebecca Grant, a civilian analyst, *Airpower in Afghanistan: How a faraway war is remaking the Air Force*, (Arlington, VA: Mitchell Institute Press, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Phillip S. Meilinger, 'COIN from Above', *Air Force*, Vol. 91, No. 7, (July 2008), p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Peter W. Gray, 'The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policing', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Summer 2001), p. 37. See also James S. Corum, 'Air Control: Reassessing the History', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Summer 2001), pp. 32 – 33.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Gray, 'The Myths of Air Control', p. 27; Corum, 'Air Control: Reassessing the History', p. 16.

suggested in his study of air-land cooperation and integration, ‘many of the methods of operational usage and control that governed subsequent air operations of this type [counter-insurgency] first appeared in the small wars of the early 1920s, specifically the wars of Great Britain...’<sup>21</sup>

The subject of air-land integration (ALI), usually called ‘army co-operation’ during the inter-war period, did generate a fair amount of study and debate within the Army and the Air Force, as evidenced by Sir John Slessor’s book, *Air Power and Armies*, the collection of lectures he delivered while on the Directing Staff at Camberley, and the number of articles in the professional journals of the time insisting that the primary role for aeroplanes was Army co-operation.<sup>22</sup> The processes, tools, and doctrine necessary for effective co-operation between air and land forces began development during the First World War.<sup>23</sup> The common belief is that between the wars the RAF ignored support to the Army. In actuality, imperial policing provided the RAF great experience in air-land integration that was to pay later rewards during the Second World War.<sup>24</sup>

In Iraq and Transjordan, the RAF created a unique manifestation of colonial control officers, a specialised cadre of airmen that were an ‘air-minded’ adaptation of an intelligence function the Army had long employed in its frontier constabulary duties—RAF Special Service Officers (SSOs), to replace or augment the political administrators in areas of the

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<sup>21</sup> Richard P. Hallion, *Strike From the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1910-1945*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1989), p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Sir John C. Slessor, *Air Power and Armies*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009); C.E. Vickery, ‘Small Wars’, *The Army Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2, (1923); C.T. Gompertz, ‘The Application of Science to Indian Frontier Warfare’, *The Army Quarterly*, vol. 10, (Apr – Jul 1925); F.W. Bewsher, ‘Cooperation between the Royal Air Force and irregular troops in the desert’, *The Army Quarterly*, vol. 12, (Apr 1926); Henry Le Marchant Brock, ‘Air operations on the NWF, 1930’, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, (1932); Rt Hon Sir Philip Sassoon, ‘Air power in the Middle East’, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 20, no. 3, (1933).

<sup>23</sup> See Gary Sheffield and Peter Gray, eds., *Changing War: The British Army, the Hundred Days Campaign and the Birth of the Royal Air Force, 1918*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> John Ferris, ‘The RAF Pursues a RMA’, *The Fog of Peace and War Planning*, Talbot C. Imlay and Monica Duffy Toft, eds., (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 171.

frontier where civilian officials could not or would not go.<sup>25</sup> Beginning with the SSOs in Iraq and Transjordan, the RAF went beyond pure air-land integration with ground forces and learned to integrate with the civilian administrative organisations.<sup>26</sup> As will be shown, this knowledge would expand beyond the RAF SSOs when the air control scheme was extended to other frontier regions of the empire and the local situation was such that civilian colonial administrators were able to safely live and work among the indigenous populations. Once Iraq achieved its independence in 1932, former SSOs moved on to other positions and other locations, passing their experiences and cultural acumen on to other civilian officials.<sup>27</sup>

Although the RAF SSOs of the inter-war period were considered part of the intelligence function, their actions and the effects they enabled went beyond pure intelligence functions. The RAF SSOs were embedded among the indigenous populations to provide local situational awareness and intelligence for British and colonial administrations and to serve as liaisons to the local tribes in order to prevent punitive military actions.<sup>28</sup> As will also be shown, the RAF's air control scheme included more than bombing and strafing, although the non-kinetics aspects of air power were often neglected or ignored, especially by critics of the air control scheme. Even during this nascent era of air power, aircraft were used to map unknown regions of the empire, transport soldiers, policemen, government officials, and

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<sup>25</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921*, (11 July 1921), p. 77; Sir John Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 70, no. 479, (Aug 1925), p. 495; TNA AIR 75/27, Air Staff Memorandum, *What Air Control Means in War and Peace and What it has Achieved*, (30 June 1930), pp. 8 – 9; TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 52, *Air Control*, (Apr 1933), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Throughout the archival sources the civil administration of the colonies, mandates, and protectorates was delivered by civil servants who are described as political administrators, tribal control officers, political officers, civil political administrators, and other similar titles.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Gerald de Gaury, an SSO in Iraq in the mid-1920s, later served as Britain's political agent in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq from 1936 – 39, and was the British Chargé d'Affaires in 1941. In 1942, he raised a force of Druze irregulars in Syria and had Wilfred Thesiger, a former political officer in Sudan, as one of the squadron commanders. Obituary, *Asian Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 2, (1984), pp. 227 – 28. Interestingly, Thesiger's boss in Sudan had been Guy Moore, another former SSO from Iraq, who 'taught him to appreciate deserts and to treat the men with whom he lived and travelled as companions instead of servants'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Jan 2007), accessed at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/92678> on 13 Sep 2015.

<sup>28</sup> TNA AIR 23/298, *Ltr from Glubb to I-branch*, (13 Mar 1926), p. 2.

supplies to areas inaccessible by ground transport, evacuate sick and injured, and drop leaflets. And, when punitive air operations were approved, the RAF SSOs would normally control and assess the application of air-delivered effects.

It is this understudied area, the mechanism by which the RAF integrated air power into the civilian colonial policing process that this thesis will explore. It will be shown that the RAF recognised that the problem of tribal control was more than a military one and that the Air Force's role was to support the civil political administration, especially in the 'wilder' regions of the empire.<sup>29</sup> The importance of air-political integration was made clear from the very beginning. In May 1920, in an addendum to the *Preliminary Scheme for the Military control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force* he had submitted in March, Trenchard stated that 'the first essential in any scheme is the closest co-operations between the civil Government of the country and the Service responsible for the safety of that Government'.<sup>30</sup> By 1930, the Air Ministry was clear in its guidance to airmen that air control included air power's 'use by political authorities in the ordinary cause of peace time administration'.<sup>31</sup>

Air-political integration was by no means perfect—civilian non-combatants were killed and mistakes were made, but that does not negate the point that the RAF grasped the political nature of air power and colonial policing, and that it created an effective means of fusing the two.<sup>32</sup> This thesis proposes that it was the RAF SSOs that 'made air control work' in Iraq, Transjordan, and Aden, and that lessons learned in this 'successful prototype [of tribal control

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<sup>29</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond on the Royal Air Force in India*, (Aug 1922), p. 4 (also found at AIR 8/46); J.A. Chamier, 'The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 66, no. 462, (May 1921), p.207; Sir John Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 70, no. 479, (Aug 1925), pp. 495 – 96; Chamier, 'Air control of frontiers', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 21, no. 3, (1934), p. 407; J.C. Slessor, 'The Development of the Royal Air Force', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 76, issue 502, (May 1931), p. 331.

<sup>30</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Memorandum with covering minute by the Chief of the Air Staff on the control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force*, (6 May 1920), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, *Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'Air Control of Frontiers', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 21, no. 3, (1934), p. 403.

from the air]’ encouraged the British to try and apply the air control scheme to other frontier regions of the empire as the SSOs moved on to other jobs and other regions, and the lessons of air-political integration were attempted beyond the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, this thesis will address this gap in the historiography of the period in order to determine how Britain worked with political officers and RAF SSOs to incorporate air power into the colonial policing process—balancing the technological and human dimensions of military air support to civil authorities.<sup>34</sup>

Britain’s strategic situation between the World Wars—dire economic circumstances, increasing autonomy in the Dominions (in 1926, these were Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and New Zealand), growing Indian and Irish nationalism, and foreign entanglements in Russia, Turkey, and the newly mandated territories under British ‘protection’, distracted from her diplomatic and economic efforts to create the League of Nations and generated a popular preference for disarmament. Anthony Clayton, in *The British Empire as a Superpower: 1919 – 1939*, observed that British politicians focused on the empire and maintaining Britain’s international primacy as a means of arresting or concealing the realities of industrial unrest, very high unemployment, and a worsening economic predicament at home.<sup>35</sup> The challenges Britain faced to control and maintain its disparate and global empire, especially in the ‘wilder’ and ‘uncivilised’ reaches,

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<sup>33</sup> Roger A. Beaumont, ‘New Lease on Empire: Air Policing, 1919 – 1939’, *Aerospace Historian*, no. 26, (June 1979), p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> Hannay, ‘Empire Air Policy’, p. 646, ‘political agents and special service officers and civil police still administer and maintain that requisite personal touch and feel the pulse, as it were, of every local situation’; and Chamier, in ‘Air Control of Frontiers’, p. 403, discusses how control of semi-independent tribes was influenced ‘through Political Officers who know their customs, speak their language, generally like them, and seek to guide them more by paternal authority than force.’

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower: 1919 - 1939*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 17.



bear a tempting similarity to the military and political situations facing the United States and the United Kingdom in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>36</sup>

Clayton also noted that in order to maintain its desired primacy as an international power, Britain exploited new military technologies to create a perception of power to control the colonies and protectorates during the post-war reconfiguration.<sup>37</sup> In the course of demobilising the massive army it had created to fight the First World War, aeroplanes and radio communications were combined to create an innovative and less costly means of policing the empire. Then, as now, technology, or ‘mechanical contrivances’, offered a tempting alternative to military manpower.<sup>38</sup>

During the inter-war period air forces replaced battalions of British and colonial soldiers that had traditionally served as frontier constabulary policing the empire. In Mesopotamia (now Iraq), Transjordan (now Jordan), and Aden (now Yemen), Britain successfully substituted air forces for the ground forces it had traditionally used to control indigenous populations and maintain stable environments for British economic interests.<sup>39</sup> While modern critics have decried the ethics of RAF imperial policing operations between the wars, in terms of what Britain needed from its air force in the 1920s and 30s—reducing the number of army battalions, decreasing the financial cost of imperial policing, minimising friendly

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<sup>36</sup> Carl H. Builder, ‘Doctrinal Frontiers’, *Airpower Journal*, vol. 9, no. 4, (Winter 1995), p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> TNA CAB 23/15, WC 616A, *Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, p. 1. ‘In order to save man-power, the utmost possible use is to be made of mechanical contrivances, which should be regarded as a means of reducing Estimates’. Also TREA 1/12353, *Letter from Controller of Supply and Services*, (July 1919), ‘overseas commitments could be dealt with via fewer British battalions, “Indian troops, aircraft, and mechanised ground forces”’; TNA AIR 8/42, CAS Archives, *Geddes Committee Memoranda*, Covering note from CAS to Sir Eric Geddes, forwarding *Notes on the Development of Mechanical Warfare in Relation on Man Power*, 3 Nov 1921; and F.S. Keen, ‘Gold Medal Prize Essay, 1922 – 23, “To what extent would the use of the latest scientific and mechanical methods of warfare affect operations on the North-West Frontier of India?”’, *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 53, no. 233, Oct 1923.

<sup>39</sup> Jafna L. Cox, ‘A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919 - 32,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1985), p. 176. The title of the article comes from a 15 May 1925 memorandum by Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in TNA CO 730/82. Also quoted in *The Times*, (1 July 1925), describing Amery’s presentation to the Central Asian Society.

casualties during military operations, and providing stability in economically unprofitable territories, air control was ‘successful’.<sup>40</sup>

## Terminology

Before continuing, it is helpful to define exactly what was meant by air control, at least as it was understood by British airmen of the inter-war period charged with implementing or supporting tribal control policies.<sup>41</sup> Neither the 1928 nor 1940 versions of the *RAF War Manual* provided a formal definition of air control. In their respective chapters dealing with operations in ‘undeveloped and semi-civilised countries’, both manuals described air operations ‘against an enemy who has little or no industrial organization, and whose social and political system is comparatively primitive in form’, but they gave no formal definition of air control.<sup>42</sup> The manuals characterised the tactical environment as air operations against a ‘semi-civilized enemy’ as undertaken with the aim of either ‘creating or restoring law and order within a country’s borders [an internal control focus], or subduing a turbulent or troublesome people on or beyond a country’s frontiers [an external, defence, focus]’.<sup>43</sup> The most helpful definition was found in 1930 Air Staff Memorandum 46, *Notes on Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*. The first paragraph is titled, ‘Definition of Air Control’. There it states that in the ‘*political administration* [emphasis added] of undeveloped countries inhabited by backward and semi-civilised populations...control is applied by aircraft as the primary arm, supplemented by forces on the ground’.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis on air power as an aid

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<sup>40</sup> Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2007); and Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Hallion, *Strike From the Sky* p. 59. ‘Generally speaking, airmen came to refer to such operations [air-ground cooperation against guerrilla-type forces] in the 1920s and 1920s as “air control,” though, in a strict sense this was only a British term’.

<sup>42</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, *AP 1300 Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1—Operations*, (July 1928), para. XIV-2; and TNA AIR 10/2311, *AP 1300 Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1—Operations*, (Feb 1940), para. XIII-2.

<sup>43</sup> *AP 1300* (July 1928), para. XIV-4, and *AP 1300* (Feb 1940), para. XIII-4.

<sup>44</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, (24 Mar 1930), p. 3.

to political administration is important and the archival sources and journals from the inter-war period are consistent in their advocacy of air power as an aid to civil authorities during peacetime.<sup>45</sup> The Deputy Chief of the Air Staff further limited the definition of air control to tribal control, a local level focus that is generally missed by modern researchers attempting to apply the air control concept to sovereign nations,

the term 'Air Control' is generally confined to the type of air operations which we use to maintain order in tribal districts, to support the political administration and possibly impose the will of the government in undeveloped countries inhabited by backward and semi-civilised populations'.<sup>46</sup>

In 1922, when the RAF was assigned responsibility for imperial policing in Iraq, the pre-requisite assumptions by the Colonial Office were 'no imminence of danger from external attack' and 'the country free from organised rebellion, but liable to ordinary spasmodic disturbances'.<sup>47</sup> The RAF's two war manuals also reiterated the primacy of moral (psychological) factors when dealing with 'a savage enemy', a point that was first brought out six years prior in C.D. 22, the Royal Air Force's *Operations Manual*,<sup>48</sup> suggesting that the threat of punishment was an appropriate means of controlling tribal behaviour before troubles began.<sup>49</sup>

David Omissi, in *Air power and colonial control*, defined air control as the point when the Air Ministry assumed responsibility for the defence of a particular region of the empire. He noted that air control was comprised of two broad elements, air policing—when aircraft were used to uphold the internal security of a state, and air substitution—when aircraft

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<sup>45</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Note of use of Air Force in Mesopotamia in its political aspects and as to its actual and potential in support of the Civil Government of that country*, (26 Feb 1921); TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means in War and Peace and What it has Achieved*, (30 June 1930), p. 6; E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, 'The Gordon-Shephard Memorial Prize Essay, 1933', *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 3, (July 1934), p. 249.

<sup>46</sup> LHA 15/3/134, *A Lecture on Air Control given by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff [AM Sir E.R. Ludlow-Hewitt] to the Officers of the Northern Command*, (Dec 1934), p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Sir John Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 70, no. 479, (Aug 1925), p. 485.

<sup>48</sup> C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, para. XI-80-7.

<sup>49</sup> *AP 1300*, (July 1928), para. XIV-52, and *AP 1300* (Feb 1940), para. XII-34.

replaced other forms of military force in imperial defence.<sup>50</sup> Ian Philpott, in *The Royal Air Force: An Encyclopaedia of the Inter-war Years, Vol. I*, took the narrower definition of air control, the ‘maintenance of internal security in a territory primarily through the use of aircraft’.<sup>51</sup> Philpott differed with Omissi on the definition of air substitution, stating that it did not mean the total replacement of ground units. Instead, Philpott defined air substitution in terms of command and control, i.e., reversing the traditional war-fighting arrangement of air forces supporting land forces by placing the Army in support of air forces, and avoiding the emotional issue of air power ‘going it alone’ in irregular warfare.<sup>52</sup> As to be expected, this ‘reversed roles’ perspective is generally promoted by the RAF’s doctrinal literature of the era,

the main striking arm to overcome resistance is air forces, the role of the forces on the ground (which term covers armoured vehicles, regular or irregular troops, armed police or tribal forces) being to provide the protection required at aerodromes, to maintain order in main centres, and, when necessary, to reap the fruits of an air operation after the main resistance has been overcome.<sup>53</sup>

The historiography shows that such an arrangement was not universally successful, but under certain conditions it did force compliance from the tribes. This thesis limits itself then, to the internal control perspective and thus defines air control as *the sum total of air-oriented actions taken to influence the behaviour of local populations and adversaries to conform to desired standards of conduct.*

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<sup>50</sup> David E. Omissi, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. xv.

<sup>51</sup> Ian M. Philpott, *The Royal Air Force: An Encyclopaedia of the Inter-war Years, Vol. I, ‘The Trenchard Years’, 1918 to 1929*, (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Books, Ltd., 2005), chap. 4, Kindle DX version, loc. 3563.

<sup>52</sup> Philpott, *An Encyclopaedia of the Inter-war Years*, chap. 4, Kindle DX version, loc. 5720 – 5722.

<sup>53</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, (24 Mar 1930), p. 7. ASM 52, *Air Control*, published in 1933, also took the ‘reversed roles’ position, saying, ‘It is that in the selected region the Royal Air Force shall be considered the predominant arm...’, TNA AIR 9/12, p. 3.

## **The Leadership**

Many of the key senior leaders who served the RAF during the Second World War gained operational or senior staff experiences policing the colonies and the Mandates between the wars. Sir John Slessor noted that the air control experience ‘had little effect on RAF strategy and doctrine, but was more important as a formative experience for many RAF officers’, serving as ‘little more than an extension of training’.<sup>54</sup> Still, the possible impact of air policing and frontier constabulary operations on the RAF’s future leadership is worth considering. For example, Sir Arthur ‘Bomber’ Harris, who would lead Bomber Command during the war, commanded 31 Sqn on the NW Frontier and 45 Sqn in Iraq. From 1938 – 39, Harris was the Air Officer Commanding in Palestine and Transjordan. Sir Ralph Cochrane served under Harris at 45 Sqn in Iraq and then later commanded 8 Sqn in Aden. During the Second World War Cochrane would command three bomber groups. Sir John Slessor commanded 3 Wing in Waziristan. He would command Coastal Command and also serve as the commander of the RAF in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Slessor would go on to become the Chief of the Air Staff. Sir Arthur Coningham commanded 55 Sqn in Iraq, was a staff officer at RAF Middle East, and was later a senior air staff officer in Sudan. Coningham would command the Western Desert Air Force and later the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force. Charles Portal, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Hungerford, was the commander of British forces in Aden, 1934 – 36. Portal would serve as Chief of the Air Staff during the Second World War. Short synopses of their biographies are at Appendix 1.

## **The Literature**

In his 1957 autobiography, Sir John Slessor observed that the roles for air power between the wars went beyond air policing and included cooperation with the Army during

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<sup>54</sup> Beaumont, pp. 89 and 90n. Omissi concluded that training, doctrine, and technology for warfare in Europe developed in isolation from what the RAF was doing as an imperial constabulary, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 210.

combat operations, reconnaissance and cartography, troop transport, disaster relief, surveying air routes, and maritime surveillance.<sup>55</sup> Slessor's earlier book *Air Power and Armies*, based on his Camberley lectures, noted that air power was intimately linked to land power. On the first page he wrote,

The object of an army in a land campaign is to defeat the enemy's army; that of the air force contingent in the field is to assist and co-operate with that army in the defeat of the enemy's army, and of such air forces as may be co-operating with it.<sup>56</sup>

Although *Air Power and Armies* did not deny the importance of army co-operation during conventional conflict, Slessor's purpose for writing it was to 'was to draw attention to the other aspect of air power ... [and] the positive influence which can be exerted by an air striking force in direct attack upon objectives on the ground'.<sup>57</sup> *Air Power and Armies* outlined the principles of air power as: centralised control, concentration of physical and moral force against the enemy's decisive points, and exploiting the speed, range, and flexibility of air forces to conduct both air and land-oriented tasks across a theatre of operations.<sup>58</sup> Slessor also noted that a key strength of air power was its ability to reach an objective independently from lines of communication (LOCs) without having to defend its flanks. Air power's independence from land LOCs became an important point during the debates over the effectiveness of air forces substituting for land forces, especially in areas such as the North-West Frontier of India and Africa which were inaccessible to the political agents because of distance, difficulty, or danger.<sup>59</sup> Slessor also acknowledged the relatively benign threat to aircraft when fighting guerrillas, observing that against a first-class enemy an air force would first need to divert some proportion of its energy to neutralising enemy air

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<sup>55</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Sir John C. Slessor, *Air Power and Armies*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 1. This is a reprint of the 1936 edition.

<sup>57</sup> Slessor, *Air Power and Armies*, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Slessor, *Air Power and Armies*, pp. 70 – 85.

<sup>59</sup> TNA CAB 24/106, CP 1320, *A Preliminary Scheme for the Military control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force*, (12 Mar 1920), p. 3; Moreman, *Development of Frontier Warfare*, p. 167; and H. Burchall, 'Air Services in Africa', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, vol. 32, no. 126, (Jan 1933), p. 73.

forces ‘in order to reduce the numbers or the morale of the hostile air forces that it *does* [emphasis in original] encounter on the way to and from its primary objectives’.<sup>60</sup>

David Omissi’s comprehensive analysis of the air control scheme, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919 – 1939*, has been a key reference document and the starting point for most other researchers’ efforts into air control.<sup>61</sup> Omissi’s work confines much of its discussion to the kinetic effects of bombing and strafing misbehaving tribal groups. The sections on air operations in Palestine and Ireland highlight the limitations of kinetically-based air control methods, especially in urban environments, reinforcing a point made early in the book that both Trenchard and Churchill recognised that air power and the RAF had limited utility to suppress ‘industrial disturbances ... in settled countries such as India, Egypt, Ireland, and England’.<sup>62</sup> Omissi contends that the negative effects, the results of what we now label collateral damage to non-combatants, non-military infrastructure, and civilian livelihoods, served to galvanise opposition against British authorities and raised ethical questions regarding the methods used to implement air control methods. In addition to its narrow emphasis on kinetic operations, the other major shortcoming with Omissi’s work is that it fails to consider the importance of the role played by the RAF’s Special Service Officers: enabling, guiding, and reinforcing the full range of air power capabilities available at the time, and also helping to create a culture of co-operation with colonial administrators that reached well beyond Iraq.

As will be seen in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, extensive use was made of archival records, predominantly from the Cabinet and Air Ministry papers. As to be expected from

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<sup>60</sup> Slessor, *Air Power and Armies*, pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>61</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, 1990.

<sup>62</sup> TNA CAB 24/96, CP 475, Forwarding memorandum from Secretary of State for Air from Chief of the Air Staff, *Capacity of the Royal Air Force to assist the Civil Power in Industrial Disturbances*, (19 Jan 1920); TNA AIR 9/12, *Memorandum by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard on the subject of the use of aircraft in the case of industrial disturbances or risings in what may be called definitely settled countries such as India and Egypt*, (26 Apr 1920).

these largely official sources, the records held a bias towards justifying imperial policing policies and efforts to ensure a peacetime role for the Royal Air Force. Of importance to this thesis though, is that examination of the archival sources shows the evolution of thought within the RAF from the beginning of the inter-war period to just before the Second World War. At the beginning of the inter-war period the emphasis was on kinetic means as the basis of air policing, giving way to more positive air-oriented means of influencing the behaviour of indigenous peoples in co-operation with local political officers and colonial administrators as new and improved aircraft and aeronautical systems capabilities were developed, fielded, and tested, but also as the RAF put its cadre of acculturated airmen in place among the targeted populations.

Contemporary dissent against the imperial policies and RAF's policing methods was found among the press that was pushing the government to make good on wartime promises.<sup>63</sup> Examples from *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* are shown in Chapters Two and Three. It is also important to remember that few of the tribal populations 'targeted' under the air control scheme had access to Western journals or newspapers, even if they had been sufficiently literate in the English language to tell their 'other side of the story'.

The archival sources were supplemented with biographies, personal papers, oral histories, and journal articles of the period. The *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution (JRUSI)*, the *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society (JRCAS)*, and the *Journal of the United Service Institution of India (JUSII)* proved to be the most helpful, although like the archival sources, these journals also exhibited expected biases related to maintaining the empire, protecting the independence of the RAF, and justifying the policy, strategy, and tactics of air control. *JRUSI* is the one of the oldest and most respected defence journals in the world. The RAF used the journal as a forum to defend its continued independence from

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<sup>63</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 31.



the Army and the Royal Navy, and also to explain and justify air policing operations during the inter-war years. *JRCAS* was created in 1914 to ‘train men and inspire men ... to support the interests of the Empire’, an overt acknowledgment of its imperialist perspective.<sup>64</sup> That said, *JRCAS* seemed to offer a higher percentage of papers opposed to tribal control from the air than did *JRUSI*. This might be explained by the diverse composition of the membership which included statesmen, diplomats, explorers, district officials, scholars, and desert surveyors, in addition to soldiers and airmen, a large percentage of whom had served in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.<sup>65</sup> While some claimed that the Royal Central Asia Society had an ‘atmosphere of gunpowder’, the percentage of military members ranged from about a third to half of the membership. The number of articles opposed to tribal control from the air might also be because the Society saw its role as cutting across inter-departmental and functional boundaries, and offering its members the opportunity for sharing approaches and reconciling differences.<sup>66</sup>

*JUSII* is a defence-oriented journal that has been published continuously for over 140 years. *JUSII* was helpful providing perspectives on tribal control operations, especially on the North-West Frontier, although its treatment of NWF operations tended towards an Army point of view because of the Army’s domination of military and political affairs in India. To a lesser extent than in *JRUSI*, the RAF used *JUSII* as another forum to debate the application of air power to national defence challenges, especially those affecting India and Indian forces supporting imperial policies.<sup>67</sup> As expected, the *Royal Air Force Quarterly* provided articles in favour of air policing and air substitution, while *Army Quarterly* leaned towards the Air

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<sup>64</sup> Robert S.G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and ‘The Tribal Question’*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Fletcher, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Fletcher, pp. 40 – 41.

<sup>67</sup> Before the First World War Iraq the Secretary of State for India and the Imperial Government of India had responsibility for administrative control of Iraq. Responsibility transferred to the Colonial Office in 1921 when Churchill created the Middle East Department there. Because of this legacy, Middle Eastern issues were still considered by *JUSII*, especially during the inter-war period.

Force's role as an important supporting arm (army co-operation) and usually decried any independent role for the Air Force in tribal control.

The British Library produced two multi-volume collections of the archival intelligence records from the period, *Afghanistan Strategic Intelligence, 1919 – 1970*, and *Iraq Defence Intelligence, 1920 – 1973*, that proved to be extremely valuable by consolidating a great number of sources from the Air Ministry (AIR), Cabinet (CAB), Colonial Office (CO), Foreign Office (FO), and War Office (WO) records related to intelligence functions. These volumes provide copies of the originals, including hand-written corrections and margin notes, rather than transcriptions of the originals, all collated in chronological order (vice by primary subject area). This format allows researchers ready access to these valuable primary sources.<sup>68</sup> Although the editors focused on theatre-level British sources, the copies of the original documents provided in these references offered valuable insight into the strategic and operational-level effects of air control operations from the British perspective.

To comprehend the necessity for employing air power in imperial constabulary duties during the inter-war period it was necessary to understand the state of the British economy and British and commonwealth forces following the First World War. As with others seeking to understand the 'Gordian Knot of imperial defence needs', Keith Jeffery's work, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918 – 1922*, offered insight as to the crisis in manpower, relationships with the Dominions and colonies, and the impact of fiscal austerity measures on an over-stretched army.<sup>69</sup> Post-war, the appropriate role of air forces was a

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<sup>68</sup> *Afghanistan Strategic Intelligence, British Records 1919-1970, vol. 1: 1919-1928: From Independence to the Civil War*, Anita L.P. Burdett, ed., (Chippenham, UK: Archive Editions, Ltd., 2002); *Afghanistan Strategic Intelligence, British Records 1919-1970, vol. 2: 1928-1939*, Anita L.P. Burdett, ed., (Chippenham, UK: Archive Editions, Ltd., 2002); *Iraq Defence Intelligence, 1920 – 1973, vol. 1: 1920 – 1925*, Anita L.P. Burdett, ed., (Chippenham, UK: Archive Editions, Ltd., 2005); *Iraq Defence Intelligence, 1920 – 1973, vol. 2: 1926 – 1932*, Anita L.P. Burdett, ed., (Chippenham, UK: Archive Editions, Ltd., 2005).

<sup>69</sup> Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918 – 1922*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 67. Jeffery is used as a key source in Omissi's *Air power and colonial control*, Martin Thomas' *Empires of Intelligence*, Toby Dodge's *Inventing Iraq*, and Priya Satia's *Spies in Arabia*.

source of lively and sometimes rancorous debate. An exciting mix of science fiction writers, airmen and soldiers, politicians, and inventors were all exploring possible applications and implications for the new technology.<sup>70</sup> Michael Paris, in his book *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859 – 1917*, observed that,

If [H.G.] Wells saw aviation as an offensive weapon, Rudyard Kipling saw it as a means of social control....Kipling's concept of air power became a reality some twenty years later when the RAF became involved in the policing of the Middle East. Interestingly, Hugh Trenchard, defending his 'air control' policy in [April] 1925, could write [in *The Times*] in such Kiplingesque terms: 'Air is the greatest civilizing influence these countries have ever known...Air methods are the reverse of the old punitive column. Our policy is one of prevention.'

Among the three Services, the question was often couched in binary terms—was air power able to bring about a strategic decision on its own or was it primarily an adjunct to land and naval power? Airmen in Britain and the United States tended to argue that air forces could be equally as decisive as the army or the navy in forcing a military decision. Unfortunately, the First World War ended before Britain's strategic bomber force was able to carry out the full range of planned operations against all the strategic targets it had identified. British airmen were constrained to demonstrating the validity of their hypothesis in the 'laboratory' they were given—imperial policing duties in the less 'civilised' regions of the empire. That constraint was specified by Churchill in December 1919, in a statement to the House of Commons while serving as the Secretary of State for War and Air,

I must remind the Honourable Members that we have still an Empire to defend. ...we have all those dependencies and possessions in our hands which existed before the war, and in addition we have large promises of new responsibilities to be placed upon us. The first duty of the RAF is to garrison the Empire.<sup>71</sup>

It was also helpful to review the character of irregular warfare and how insurgents combine violence and ideology to achieve political, social, or economic ends. Joint

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859 – 1917*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard: Man of Vision*, (London: Collins, 1962), p. 354.

Publication 1, *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States*, defines irregular warfare as ‘violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population’.<sup>72</sup> Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, elaborates on the definition by adding ‘irregular warfare can include a variety of steady-state and surge DoD activities and operations: counterterrorism; unconventional warfare; foreign internal defense; counterinsurgency; and stability operations that, in the context of IW, involve establishing or re-establishing order in a fragile state’.<sup>73</sup> Modern policy and doctrines for irregular warfare are based heavily on the classic writings such as Mao Zedong’s *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Charles Callwell’s *Small Wars*, David Galula’s *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, T.E. Lawrence’s ‘Evolution of a Revolt’, Bard E. O’Neill’s, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, and Frank Kitson’s *Low-intensity Operations*, to name but a few.<sup>74</sup>

Callwell’s *Small Wars* was another important reference to consider. Originally written in 1896, it became ‘the Bible’ for colonial warfare and imperial policing at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>75</sup> *Small Wars* offered soldiers a version of doctrine to help address the challenges of guerrilla warfare. As *Small Wars* originally written before the advent of powered, manned flight, it was naturally written from a soldier’s two-dimensional perspective. That said, *Small Wars* offered some principles of irregular and counter-insurgency operations that have proven to be enduring and agnostic of physical domain, such

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<sup>72</sup> Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine of the US Armed Forces of the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, (14 May 2006), p. I-1. (hereafter referred to as Joint Pub 1)

<sup>73</sup> Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, Washington, D.C., (1 Dec 2008), p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Samuel B. Griffith, II, trans., (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000); C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (1906), (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964); T.E. Lawrence, ‘Evolution of a Revolt’, *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, (Oct 1920); Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, (Dulles: VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005); Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, and Peacekeeping*, (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2007, originally published in 1971).

<sup>75</sup> Michael Crawshaw, ‘The evolution of British COIN’, a supplement to JDP 3-40, *Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*, (Shrivenham, UK: Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre, 21 Dec 2012), p. 4.

as the importance of subjective forms of intelligence.<sup>76</sup> Two to three decades later, airmen arguing for the application of air methods to colonial control turned land-centric documents such as these around, using similar arguments to suggest how air power might achieve results similar to what their Army counterparts realised against irregular opponents.

Colin Gray observed that the distinction between irregular warfare and insurgency tends to be an academic exercise that lends little to understanding the complexity and subtle nuances of the subjects. Official definitions, he said, tended to be ‘encyclopaedic and are utterly indigestible’, and the result was an array of terms with minor, subtle differences, all describing the same phenomenon.<sup>77</sup> Professor Gray then goes on to ask, ‘Are we talking about irregular warfare, insurgency, low-intensity conflict, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and so forth? The answer is yes, and more than those’.<sup>78</sup> John Arquilla from the Naval Postgraduate School reinforced the point by noting ‘efforts to simplify the concept of irregular warfare have tended to slight the complex elements that are so necessary to a proper understanding of the phenomenon’.<sup>79</sup> For the purpose of this study classic counter-insurgency theory and doctrine, with a smattering of current perspectives added, forms the basis of the irregular warfare theory and doctrine considered.

Understanding irregular warfare and insurgent strategies helps to link the air control lessons from the inter-war period with the current conflict environment, an important point if lessons from the period are to be of value to modern analysts. The character of irregular

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<sup>76</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 43 – 56 and 143 - 45. It is interesting to note that BAFM, vol. 1, pt. 10 (2009) maligned *Small Wars* as ‘both too simple and unsophisticated’ by today’s standards and misstating that it omitted important factors ‘such as intelligence’, p. CS 1-1.

<sup>77</sup> Colin Gray, ‘Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters’, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, (Winter 2007), p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> Colin Gray, ‘Irregular Warfare’, p. 37.

<sup>79</sup> John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World*, (Plymouth, UK: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2011), p. 7.

warfare and insurgency has been extensively and persuasively covered, from both sides of the issue – insurgent and counter-insurgent.<sup>80</sup>

One would have expected the parallels between irregular warfare and the early concepts of employment for air power to spark previous research, but there is surprisingly little available when compared to the amount of writing and depth of analysis devoted to air power in conventional conflicts. Perhaps this is to be expected given that until very recently most airmen tended towards a near singular focus on discussions of air power's potential war-winning capacity in interstate, conventional-regular warfare. The official disdain towards small wars by airmen had its roots in the earliest doctrinal manuals—'The principles laid down ... for the conduct of air operations hold good whether the enemy is a highly developed nation, or an uncivilized tribe...'.<sup>81</sup> And while there have been notable exceptions, such as presentations at the Royal United Service Institution, the Royal Central Asian Society, and the United Service Institution of India that considered the role of air power through the lens of Callwell's *Small Wars*,<sup>82</sup> chapters in the Royal Air Force's doctrinal publications of the period,<sup>83</sup> and references to aviation employment at the tactical level in the US Marine Corps'

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<sup>80</sup> In addition to the works written by practitioners and proponents of insurgent/guerrilla warfare; Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyễn Giáp, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Carlos Marighella, et al, there are numerous other credible publications chronicling and examining the theories, strategies, methods, and motivations of insurgents, revolutionaries, and guerrilla leaders. A few examples include Bernard Fall (*Street Without Joy*, 1961), Frances Fitzgerald (*Fire in the Lake*, 1973), Gérard Chaliand (*Revolution in the Third World*, 1977), Richard Clutterbuck *Guerrillas and Terrorists*, 1977), Walter Laqueur (*Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study*, 1976), and Robert Tabor (*War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, 1965). Bard O'Neill provides a synopsis of post-World War II insurgent and guerrilla characteristics and strategies in *Insurgency & Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (1990), updated and retitled in 2005 to *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. John Arquilla draws lessons and themes from 'masters of irregular warfare' in *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World*, (2011).

<sup>81</sup> A.P. 1300, Chap. XIV, para. 3. It is interesting to note however, that some RAF officers between the wars were studying alternative cases of air operations in difficult environments. For example, see Hannay's reference to the US Marine Corps' small wars experiences during the 1920s in Nicaragua in 'Empire Air Policy', p. 647.

<sup>82</sup> For example, A.E. Borton, 'The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 65, no. 458, (May 1920); R.H. Peck, 'Aircraft in Small Wars', *JRUSI*; and Brock, 'Air operations on the NWF, 1930', *JRCAS*.

<sup>83</sup> C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, Chap XI, 'Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy', (July 1922), A.P. 1300, *War Manual of the RAF*, Chap XIV, 'Air Operations in Undeveloped and Semi-civilized Countries',

*Small Wars Manual*,<sup>84</sup> air power's appropriate role in irregular warfare, especially since the end of the Second World War, if considered at all, was near-universally relegated to a lesser-included subset of an air force's primary responsibilities.

Meilinger, in 'Trenchard and "Morale Bombing",' pointed out that 'although air policing was a major RAF mission between the wars, it was not something the Service wanted to "hang its doctrinal hat on"...such operations were considered of far less importance than conventional air warfare'.<sup>85</sup> In April 1962, the USAF created the Special Air Warfare Center in response to President Kennedy's call to develop forces and tactics suitable for counter-insurgency warfare.<sup>86</sup> Simultaneously though, the Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. LeMay, directed his subordinate commanders that counter-insurgency was a 'lesser form of warfare in an airman's perspective, vice a different type'.<sup>87</sup> David Dean, a researcher at the USAF's Air University in the 1980s, suggested that in the aftermath of Vietnam, the US Air Force avoided consideration of the methods, means, and doctrines necessary for success in small wars.<sup>88</sup> And, while there are excellent, relevant case studies regarding both the successful and unsuccessful applications of air power to irregular conflicts, the systematic and unemotional consideration of air power doctrine, organisation, force structure, training, and

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(TNA Air 10/1911, July 1928), ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, (TNA AIR 5/170), and A.P 1300, *War Manual of the RAF*, Chap XIII, 'Air Operations in Unadministered and Undeveloped Areas', (TNA Air 10/2311, Feb 1940).

<sup>84</sup> *USMC Small Wars Manual*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940).

<sup>85</sup> Philip S. Meilinger, 'Trenchard and "Morale Bombing": The Evolution of Royal Air Force Doctrine before World War II', *Airwar: Theory and Practice*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1996), p. 48. This chapter was first published in the *Journal of Military History*, April 1996.

<sup>86</sup> Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965*, (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), p. 79.

<sup>87</sup> Curtis E. LeMay, 'Airpower in Guerrilla Warfare', *Air Force Information Policy Letter for Commanders*, no. 80, (15 Apr 1962). This attitude survived until 2008 when the US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, set the USAF on a new course, 'Speech to National Defense University', 29 Sep 2008, Accessed at [www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1279](http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1279) on 8 Dec 2009.

<sup>88</sup> David J. Dean, 'Air Power in Small Wars: The British Air Control Experience', *Air University Review*, July – Aug 1983, p. 30. See also by Dean, 'The USAF in Low-Intensity Conflict: The Special Air Warfare Center' *Air University Review*, Jan – Feb 1985; and *Air Force Role in Low-Intensity Conflict*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1986). Dennis Drew, 'US Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge: A Short Journey to Confusion', *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 62, no. 4, (Oct 1998), p. 809.

equipment appropriate for irregular conflict has tended to be a subject of junior officer debate as successive generations of post-Second World War Air Force leaders concentrated on policy development and equipment procurement best suited for warfare at the high end of the technology spectrum.<sup>89</sup> Greg Kennedy captured the general sense of disdain for irregular warfare among Cold War airmen when he observed that, ‘The Atomic Age was also the Air Age, and all small wars and minor roles were seen as either an annoyance or an interesting sidelight in the post-Second World War RAF world’.<sup>90</sup>

In the 1943 edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy*, Edward Warner’s essay on the origins of air warfare theories, ‘Douhet, Mitchell, Seversky: Theories of Air Warfare’, centred on the survival of the air arm as an independent Service.<sup>91</sup> Warner’s essay looked at the influence of Italian air power theorist, Giulio Douhet, on the development of air power strategies in the US, Great Britain, France, and Germany. Curiously though, Warner completely ignored Trenchard’s efforts to create and sustain the world’s first independent air force, his contributions to air power theory, and his influence upon Mitchell. Other theorists of the era such as J.F.C. Fuller and B.H. Liddell Hart took notice that the aeroplane had added a third, vertical, dimension to war-fighting.<sup>92</sup> Liddell Hart wrote that the nation that developed their air power had the ability to achieve strategic results through tactical actions.

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<sup>89</sup> Carl Builder suggested that the USAF needed ‘intellectual frontiersmen’ willing to think imaginatively and evolve doctrine, tactics, and equipment to the irregular conflicts of a post-Cold War world. Builder, p. 2. A sampling of USAF ‘frontiersmen’ includes: Capt George C. Morris, ‘The Other Side of COIN: Low-Technology Aircraft and Little Wars’, *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 1991); Maj Richard Newton, ‘A US Air Force Role in Counterinsurgency Support’, *Aerospace Power Journal*, (Fall 1989); Capt Vance C. Bateman, ‘The Role of Tactical Air Power in Low-Intensity Conflict’, *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 1991); and Capt David Willard Parsons, ‘British Air Control: A Model for the Application of Air Power in Low-Intensity Conflict?’, *Airpower Journal*, (Summer 1994). See also, Drew, p. 827.

<sup>90</sup> Greg Kennedy, ‘The concept of Imperial Defence, 1856 – 1956’, *Imperial Defence: The old world order, 1856 - 1956*, Greg Kennedy, ed., (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Edward Warner, ‘Douhet, Mitchell, Seversky: Theories of Air Warfare’, *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Meade Earle, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), pp. 485 – 503.

<sup>92</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, ‘The Supremacy of Air Power’, *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2, (April 1930), p. 241. In the article, Fuller starts off very laudatory of the air service, ‘heralds a new means of movement... which is destined to change civilization, and with it the nature of war’, but he then goes on to discuss the best use of the aeroplane as the ‘eyes’ of the general and that the Army and the Air Force would be better fused into one service.



Aircraft would ‘jump over the army which shields the enemy government, industry, and people, and *so strike direct and immediately at the seat of the opposing will and policy*’.<sup>93</sup> [emphasis in original] In *Paris or The Future of War*, Liddell Hart noted that the focus of military operations had changed from ‘destruction of the enemy’s armed forces in the main theatre of war’ to ‘subdue the enemy’s will to resist, with the least possible human and economic loss to itself’.<sup>94</sup> This shift in emphasis is an important point to note and offers clues as to the roots of British strategic thinking about the role of air power. J.F.C. Fuller takes a similar position, predicting a change to a ‘new means of war...based on destroying command ...before it has been attacked’ using ‘novelty of means’ to economize military force.<sup>95</sup> The shift in theoretical focus noted by Liddell Hart, Fuller, and others, from the enemy army to the willpower of the enemy leadership would be reflected in contemporary thinking related to air control.

In *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources*, Meilinger pointed out that the difference between US and British air power theory before the Second World War was that American airmen focused on the physical domain, attacking industries, transportation networks, and communications nodes in order to destroy enemy war-making capabilities. British theory also advocated attacking enemy industries, transportations networks, and communications nodes, but as a means of affecting the moral domain by disrupting lives and livelihoods of the citizenry in order to make life so difficult and onerous that the populace would demand their leaders end the war.<sup>96</sup> The research indicated that British emphasis on the moral domain, disrupting and inconveniencing the lives and routines of the populace in

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<sup>93</sup> Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Paris: or The Future of War*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1925), p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> Liddell Hart, *Paris*, p. 19.

<sup>95</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1926), p. 292, reprinted by the US Army Combat Studies Institute, 1993.

<sup>96</sup> Phillip S. Meilinger, *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2001), p. 118.

order to force a decision by the leadership was reflected in tactics and strategies the RAF employed to control indigenous peoples on the frontiers of its empire.

Research into the doctrinal foundations for air control revealed an interesting twist. Slessor wrote that in 1924, as a student at the RAF Staff College, the airmen in those early classes had no air-oriented doctrine to guide them.<sup>97</sup> This is a remarkable assertion considering that C.D. 22, the RAF's *Operations Manual*, was published in July 1922. Allen English, in 'The RAF Staff College and the Evolution of British Strategic Bombing Policy, 1922 – 1929', pointed out that C.D. 22 was one of 'two key publications used on the first courses [at Andover] as references'. After 1923, C.D. 22 was issued to every officer who attended the Staff College.<sup>98</sup> It and other doctrinally relevant documents such as Air Staff Memoranda and Air Staff Notes were being produced and distributed to RAF officers at the time.<sup>99</sup> And, although Omissi contends that the constabulary operations on the frontiers had no influence on the training and doctrine required for European war, the fact that the earliest RAF Operations Manual devoted a short chapter to 'Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy', along with the experience future leaders of the RAF would gain during imperial policing duties, suggests there was likely some measure of inspiration and future influence, at the least in the British continued emphasis of the moral over the physical domain. Slessor did acknowledge that a cadre of British airmen who had served under

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<sup>97</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 41.

<sup>98</sup> Allen D. English, 'The RAF Staff College and the Evolution of British Strategic Bombing Policy, 1922 – 1929', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, (Sep 1993), p. 411. English also noted that the directing staff and students in these early classes examined the manual 'sentence by sentence in light of experience in the field'.

<sup>99</sup> Neville Parton, *The Evolution and Impact of Royal Air Force Doctrine: 1919 - 1939*, (Cambridge, UK: Selwyn College, University of Cambridge, Oct 2009), pp. 241 – 243. Examples of the 'minor doctrinal publications' available to Slessor's course at the Air Staff College included C.D. 18, *The Future of the Air Force in National and Imperial Defence*, (1921), C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, (1921), ASM 16, *Statement by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond of his views upon the principles governing the use of air power in Iraq*, (1924), ASM 19, *Memorandum by the Air Staff on the Psychological effect of air bombardment on semi-civilised peoples*, (1924), ASN 12, *Memorandum by the Air Staff on the effects likely to be produced by intensive aerial bombing of semi-civilised people*, (undated, circa 1921), ASN 13, *Selection of evidence on which the Air Staff base their claim to power of aircraft in uncivilised countries*, (undated, circa 1922), and an unnumbered ASN, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, (1 Aug 1924).

Trenchard's leadership and tutelage had the vision and the faith to evolve a 'theory of air warfare based on the supremacy of the offensive, which was to be triumphantly vindicated twenty years later'.<sup>100</sup>

Robin Higham, Malcolm Smith, and Tami Davis-Biddle all noted that while some of Douhet's work may have been available in English in 1923, there is no evidence to suggest that Douhet had any significant influence on the development of the RAF's theory and doctrine in the decade following the First World War.<sup>101</sup> Higham goes so far as to claim Frederick Sykes and P.R.C. Groves had begun work on a British theory of air power before the war and 'submitted it as a Cabinet paper in 1918, long before Douhet's work was known'.<sup>102</sup> Slessor denied any influence by Douhet on the RAF during those early years, stating, 'We were not (strange though it may seem) nurtured on the pure milk of Douhet. I had never heard of him in those days and even now have never read him'.<sup>103</sup> During the 1930s, the *Royal Air Force Quarterly* published articles based upon Douhet's theories, but by that time the RAF had firmly established its own, indigenous, theoretical foundation and the articles about Douhet may have been little more than discussion pieces to show that others had developed similar intellectual theories for the employment of air power.<sup>104</sup> In America, the Air Corps Tactical School had copies of the 1923 English translation of Douhet's *Command of the Air* and were studying, copying, and distributing excerpts from it in order to

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<sup>100</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 41.

<sup>101</sup> Robin Higham, *The Military Intellectuals, 1918 – 1939*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1966), p. 258; Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between The Wars*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 432; Tami Davis-Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945*, (Princeton, CT: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 107.

<sup>102</sup> Robin Higham, 'The Dangerously Neglected—The British Military Intellectuals, 1918 – 1939', *Military Affairs*, vol. 29, no. 2, (Summer 1965), p. 76.

<sup>103</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 41; Malcolm Smith, "'A Matter of Faith": British Strategic Air Doctrine before 1939', Letter from Slessor to M. Smith, 17 Mar 1972, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 15, no. 3, (July 1980), p. 441fn.

<sup>104</sup> *Royal Air Force Quarterly* articles from the era that are related to Douhet include: 'Air Doctrine of Giulio Douhet', vol. 4, no. 2, (Apr 1933), 'General Giulio Douhet—An Italian Apostle of Air Power', and 'Air Warfare—The Principle of Air Warfare by General Giulio Douhet', vol. 7, no. 2, (Apr 1936).

apply the theories to the American strategic situation.<sup>105</sup> While the air power debates of the period, at least in Great Britain and the United States, focused on the future role of air forces as a decisive force in conventional, interstate warfare, a few airmen made the linkage between aerial warfare and guerrilla warfare.

In 1920, A.E. Borton, who had commanded British air forces in Palestine during the war and worked with T.E. Lawrence to support the Arab irregulars during the Palestine campaign, gave a lecture at Royal United Service Institution (RUSI) which showed how air power might be employed in small war scenarios.<sup>106</sup> He was one of the first in a series of British airmen who, over the next few years, would lecture at RUSI, the Royal Central Asian Society, and elsewhere to make the case for air power's role policing the frontiers.<sup>107</sup>

Lawrence published 'Evolution of a Revolt' in the *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* in 1920. In 1935, he published an expanded recollection of his experiences, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, which described the lessons he had derived from his experiences with the Arabs during the First World War. In both of these publications Lawrence noted that irregular forces could be anywhere, but also nowhere, forcing the enemy to defend everywhere at great cost of manpower and resources. This notion of an indefensible threat would echo in later arguments made by air power advocates.

Irregular forces, wrote Lawrence, held the initiative as to when and where to give battle, containing the enemy 'by the silent threat of a vast unknown desert, not disclosing ourselves

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<sup>105</sup> Richard H. Kohn and Joseph P. Harahan, 'Editors' Introduction' to Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, p. ix.

<sup>106</sup> Borton, 'The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars', pp. 311 – 15.

<sup>107</sup> Others included Chamier, 'The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons'; C.J. MacKay, 'The Influence in the Future of Aircraft Upon Problems of Imperial Defence,' *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 57, no. 466, (May 1922); J.B. Glubb, 'Air and Ground Forces in Punitive Expeditions', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 71, no. 483, (Feb 1926); R.H. Peck, 'Aircraft in Small Wars.'; N.H. Bottomley, 'The Work of the Royal Air Force on the North-West Frontier', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 84, no. 536, (1939); Brock, 'Air operations on the NWF, 1930'; Sir Samuel J.G. Hoare, 'Aviation and the British Empire', *Scottish Geographical Society Magazine*, vol. 45, no. 1 (15 Jan 1929); and Rt Hon Sir Philip Sassoon, 'Air power in the Middle East', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 20, no. 3, (1933).

till we attacked'.<sup>108</sup> Irregular warfare was war of detachment waged by maintaining separation from one's opponent and sustaining an ever-likely threat of combat vice the conventional-regular strategy of war of attachment, based upon maintaining constant contact with the enemy in order to avert tactical surprises.<sup>109</sup> From 1916 until the end of the First World War, Lawrence honed and refined his 'doctrine' of irregular warfare, drawing a distinction between 'modern war', the conventional, highly technical, war of attachment between nations and the irregular, detached, Arab way of war.<sup>110</sup>

What was also interesting to note was Lawrence's growing inclination towards air power and the germination of a theme he would later build upon when advocating the air control scheme to sceptics. In the spring of 1918, during General Allenby's Palestine campaign, Lawrence had the opportunity to witness the efficacy of air power, especially in the context of irregular warfare. He recorded that Arab irregulars would often quit the fight and return home whenever the Turks or Germans attacked them from the air.<sup>111</sup> Likening the enemy's air threat to his irregulars to the threat those same irregulars posed to the conventional Turkish forces, Lawrence realised the characteristics of air power made it possible to hold his entire guerrilla force at risk.<sup>112</sup> But, he also saw the value of friendly air power as what today is called a force multiplier—providing reconnaissance, fire support, re-supply, and communications to the Arabs.<sup>113</sup> Among the airmen assigned to Allenby, working with and supporting Lawrence, was Borton, whom Lawrence labelled a man 'avid of novelty' because

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<sup>108</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, (New York: Doubleday, 1935), p. 194.

<sup>109</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Evolution of a Revolt*, Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute reprint, (undated), p.10; originally published in the *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, (Oct 1920), and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 194.

<sup>110</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, pp. 190 - 192. This is the section of *Seven Pillars* where he discusses the beginning of his doctrine.

<sup>111</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 612.

<sup>112</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 619.

<sup>113</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, pp. 613 – 620.

of his tendency to find innovative solutions to complex problems.<sup>114</sup> In 1922, Borton would serve as the commander of Air Force forces under Sir John Salmond when the RAF took over imperial policing duties in Iraq.

Lawrence recognised that irregular warfare, with its emphasis on the threat of force rather than actual application of force, shifted conflict into the moral (psychological) domain by denying an enemy the opportunity for physical contact. Upon calculating the number of men a conventional Turkish army would need to control the Arabian Peninsula against Arab irregulars supported by British air power, what Lawrence called the ‘algebraic’ element, Lawrence realised that the number was staggering—in the range of 600,000 men.<sup>115</sup> The Turks, unable to find and fight the Arabs, and with their units essentially confined to a few cities and the fortified outposts along the railway lines became ‘like plants, immobile, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head’. The Arab irregulars could control the ‘biological’ element of the fight by taking away the Turks’ ability to apply superior military capabilities and tactics in combat.<sup>116</sup> Hard pressed to strike a decisive blow and living under the near constant threat of an Arab irregular force that might mass and overwhelm an outpost or detachment, and also faced with the added reality that British air power was able to reconnoitre and strike with near impunity throughout the region, Turkish forces ceded control of the region.

Lawrence claimed that he suggested to Churchill, while the latter was still the Secretary of State for War and Air, and before the 1921 Cairo Conference, that aeroplanes could

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<sup>114</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 615.

<sup>115</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, pp. 192 – 193. Lt Gen Karl Eikenberry, as the commander of coalition forces in Afghanistan, reinforced the algebraic factor in irregular warfare, pointing out that were it not for the advantages provided by air power, he would require about 600,000 soldiers to control his area of responsibility. Eikenberry, *NATO’s Future Joint Air & Space Power*, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p. 192.

substitute for battalions as a means of controlling tribal behaviour in the Middle Eastern Mandates.<sup>117</sup> Lawrence told his biographer,

The war showed me that a combination of armoured cars and aircraft could rule the desert: but that they must be under non-army control, and without infantry support. ... As soon as I was able to have a voice on the Middle East, I approached Trenchard on the point, and with Winston's eager support persuaded the Cabinet swiftly into approving (against the wiles of Henry Wilson [Chief of the Imperial General Staff])—and it has worked very well.<sup>118</sup>

Considering that as early as August 1919, Trenchard had suggested to Churchill that air power could be an effective deterrent against hostile actions by 'semi-civilised' opponents,<sup>119</sup> Lawrence's claim to be the originator of the air control scheme may not be completely accurate.<sup>120</sup> His contention though, that aircraft, as 'winged irregulars' would do tomorrow what the Arabs had recently done to the Turks in the Great War, 'yet more swiftly...with an intangibly ubiquitous distribution of force—pressing everywhere yet assailable nowhere', proved to be a prescient glimpse of RAF air control operations.<sup>121</sup>

Lawrence's theories and his predictions about the efficacy of air power in an irregular context dovetailed nicely with the theoretical constructs being considered by those who envisioned a more strategic role for air power. The early air power theorists noted that air power had a similar, perceived ubiquity as guerrillas and aeroplanes' abilities to range the depth and breadth of the battlespace with seeming impunity made it possible for them to

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<sup>117</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *T.E. Lawrence to his Biographers Robert Graves and Liddell Hart*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 112; also Sluglett, p. 279fn.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Lawrence of Arabia*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1934), p. 245.

<sup>119</sup> TNA AIR 8/2, *CAS Memorandum on Status of the RAF*, 14 Aug 1919. '.

<sup>120</sup> Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 22–23. Philip Towle suggested that Churchill and Trenchard likely discussed the 'possibility of using the newly-founded RAF to police the Empire...' in late 1919 (*Pilots and Rebels*, p. 13). In Feb 1920, Churchill asked Trenchard to develop a plan for the RAF to garrison Mesopotamia (TNA AIR 9/14, Feb 1920). At the time, Lawrence was obsessively working on *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and he was not called by Churchill to join the Colonial Office until late 1920 or early 1921, in Malcolm Brown, *T.E. Lawrence*, (London: The British Library, 2003), p. 111.

<sup>121</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *'T.E. Lawrence' in Arabia and After*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p. 469.

strike at the time and place of the attacker's choosing. In a 1932 speech to the House of Commons, Stanley Baldwin noted the challenge of defending against air power,

In the next war you will find any town within the reach of an aerodrome can be bombed within the first five minutes of war to an extent inconceivable in the last war and the question is whose morale will be shattered quickest by preliminary bombing. ... I think it well also for the man in the street to realize there is no power on earth that can protect him from bombing, whatever people may tell him. The bomber will always get through, and it is very easy to understand if you realize area and space.<sup>122</sup>

Just as Lawrence's irregulars were seemingly able to be everywhere, yet nowhere, Baldwin's speech pointed out air power's perceived ability to hold an entire nation at risk without being physically present. The similarities between irregular forces and air power did not go completely unnoticed however, which may help to explain why those seeking innovative solutions to the problems of policing the empire would propose air power as a tool to counter the power of the irregular adversaries on the frontiers of the empire.<sup>123</sup>

Toby Dodge, in *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*, observed that British state-building efforts in Iraq after the First World War suffered from a tension brought about by London's commitment to join the three provinces of Iraq: Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, into a modern, independent state and also from resistance by colonial administrators who had been brought up in the long-standing traditions of the Indian colonial model opposed to indigenous self-determination.<sup>124</sup> Within the British government, there was no consensus on the future governance of Iraq, due in part to the competing influences of

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<sup>122</sup> Stanley Baldwin, 'The Bomber Will Always Get Through', *The Impact of Air Power*, Eugene Emme, ed., (Princeton, NJ: D. van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1959), pp. 51 – 52. Baldwin was the Lord President of the Council as the result of leading his party into coalition to support the Prime Minister, MacDonald. MacDonald's waning health meant that Baldwin was perhaps the de facto Prime Minister. The speech was given in the House of Commons prior to the 1933 Disarmament Conference.

<sup>123</sup> English, 'Evolution of British Strategic Bombing Policy', p. 420. Candidates for Andover were advised to read Callwell's *Small Wars* as one of six to seven books necessary to prepare for the staff course, which suggests that the future leaders of the RAF were considering the role of air power in irregular conflict.

<sup>124</sup> Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 15 – 16.



the major policy-making centres of the British Empire—London and Delhi.<sup>125</sup> The League of Nations intended, and the British accepted, that at some point the Mandates would gain their independence.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, during the summer of 1920 the British replaced A.T. Wilson with Percy Cox as the High Commissioner in Baghdad. Cox was directed to implement a series of programmes that would find new ways to reduce the cost of administering the Iraq Mandate and would lead that nation to an independent state.<sup>127</sup> Accordingly, by 1928 all British and Indian army units had departed Iraq. Differences between British interests in the region and Iraqi desires though, delayed the granting of full independence until October 1932.<sup>128</sup>

Peter Sluglett, in *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, summarised the dilemma Churchill faced in the aftermath of the war. For his own political survival, but also for British economic reasons, he needed to reduce the cost of imperial defence while also maintaining Britain's commercial interests and political prestige abroad.<sup>129</sup> With multiple competing demands on the Exchequer, large imperial expenditures for the Middle East could not be defended in Parliament or to the British taxpayers. During a December 1920 Cabinet meeting, Churchill questioned of the cost of policing Mesopotamia by the War Office,

Criticism of the Government's expenditure was becoming every day more insistent, particularly from the Government's own supporters, and it was clear that the country would demand that the permanent military expenditure of the future should be vigorously reduced. This was especially the case as regards Mesopotamia.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Keith Jeffery, *The British army and the crisis of empire: 1918 – 22*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 130; Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 48.

<sup>127</sup> Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 16 – 17.

<sup>128</sup> TNA TREA 172/1633, *Personal note from Trenchard to Churchill, with reply*, 3 Nov 1928.

<sup>129</sup> Sluglett, pp. 40 – 41; Robert Graves, *T.E. Lawrence to his Biographers Robert Graves and Liddell Hart*, (London: Cassel & Co., Ltd., 1938), pp. 110 – 111; Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 22.

<sup>130</sup> TNA CAB 23/23, *Conclusions of a conference of ministers*, (1 Dec 1920), p. 4.

Churchill needed a means that would establish and maintain peace among the indigenous people of the Mandates, at minimal cost.<sup>131</sup> With Cabinet policy assuming there would be no major threat to Britain for at least ten years, a need to find financial economies in the Army and Air Force Estimates, and the Air Force offering an innovative solution, Churchill found a willing collaborator in Trenchard.<sup>132</sup>

Philip Towle, Peter Sluglett, Priya Satia, and Martin Thomas' related works all add to the understanding of British air control and air policing policy between the World Wars, how the air control scheme was implemented in the Middle East, and their perspectives on the resulting effects.<sup>133</sup> These modern references provide historical and cultural analyses of what happened. None, however, looked much beyond bombing and strafing in their discussions of air control. Their discussions of intelligence and air integration tended towards political intelligence and the use of spies, rather than how the RAF used SSOs and civil administrators to assess local situations, recommend appropriate air-delivered effects, and direct the application of air power.

T.R. Moreman's research into the development of frontier warfare techniques on the North-west Frontier of India provided great insight into the challenges of tribal control in that theatre of British Empire, especially the 'inability of the local political administration to

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<sup>131</sup> Sir Frederick Sykes, as Chief of the Air Staff from Apr 1918 to Jan 1919, had raised the issue of air forces 'for Imperial police work, mail carrying, and other public duties', to deal with post-war frontier administration and control issues in India, the Middle East, West Africa, East Africa, and South Africa. TNA CAB 24/71/79, GT 6477, *Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff on Air Power Requirements of the Empire*, (9 Dec 1918), pp. 7 – 13.

<sup>132</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Minute from Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of State for War, 29 Feb 1920*, p. 1. 'I shall be glad if you will, without delay, submit a scheme and state whether you consider the internal security of the country [Mesopotamia] could be maintained by it [the Royal Air Force]'. Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918 – 1922*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 65 – 66.

<sup>133</sup> Philip Anthony Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The use of aircraft in unconventional warfare, 1918 – 1988*, (Oxford, UK: Brassey's Ltd., 1989); Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2007); Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

pacify the tribal territory'.<sup>134</sup> Moreman documents how the relationship between military and civilian agencies in the tribal regions changed over time due to changing policies and priorities among the political leadership, and how this affected the armed Services attempting to control reluctant subjects through various means of persuasion and coercion.

Newly published research by Robert S.G. Fletcher offered insight into British civilian administration of remote desert regions and control of the nomadic peoples who lived in the Middle East.<sup>135</sup> In *British Imperialism and 'The Tribal Question'*, Fletcher deals with the challenges of an expanding empire as Britain accepted responsibility for the Mandates. In the course of describing how British officials overcame deficiencies in their knowledge and understanding of the empire's desert corridor' from Western Egypt to Iraq, and the Bedouin communities that had inhabited the region for centuries.<sup>136</sup> The book notes how a mixture of coercion, collaboration, and control had been used for centuries to influence the behaviour of the Bedouin. '*Tribal Question*' is a valuable addition to the understanding of the era in that it offers a perspective of the desert peoples Britain was charged to oversee in the region—an angle overlooked by the predominant analyses that focused on burgeoning Arab nationalism, Britain's post-war financial challenges, and post-war disarmament and globalism. Fletcher affirms a point this thesis also makes, that in Iraq the RAF created the SSOs to take on many of the 'duties formerly exercised by British Political Officers, including influencing tribal policy, directing military operations, and liaising between local inhabitants and groups'.<sup>137</sup>

Another fairly modern work that attempts to analyse the experiences of Britain's air control methods in order to glean lessons relevant to modern airmen is *Airpower in Small*

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<sup>134</sup> Moreman, *Development of Frontier Warfare*.

<sup>135</sup> Robert S.G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and 'The Tribal Question'*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>136</sup> Fletcher, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> Fletcher, p. 98.

*Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*, by James Corum and Wray Johnson.<sup>138</sup> In their chapter on British air control between the wars, Corum and Johnson briefly lay out the historical context and then conclude with an assessment of air control methods and how airmen have taken the wrong lessons from Britain's air control experience. They offer that air control was 'good doctrine for casualty avoidance', but as a strategy it failed to hold up in all but the most minor kinds of tribal policing operations, a theme that was picked up by some of their students at the USAF School of Advanced Airpower Studies.<sup>139</sup> Corum and Johnson's chapter covering the inter-war period also includes a comparison with French, Spanish, and Italian air control efforts.<sup>140</sup> Corum and Johnson make no mention of the SSOs, which is most likely due to the encyclopaedic nature of their work than to oversight. Because the book covers so many case studies of air power in small wars, beginning with the Americans' campaign against Pancho Villa in 1916 and ending with Israel's intervention in Lebanon in 1982, the descriptions and analyses were necessarily brief. The value of the book though, was that it re-invigorated the professional discussion of air power's role in irregular conflict at a time when the US Army and US Marine Corps were leading the development of new ground-centric doctrine for counter-insurgency in the United States.

In 2002, Stephen Biddle from the US Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute examined the initial phase of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the US intervention in Afghanistan to take down al Qaeda and the Taliban, as a potential model for the use of modern air power in unconventional warfare.<sup>141</sup> In his monograph, Biddle proposed an 'Afghan Model', the combination of special operations forces (SOF) embedded with

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<sup>138</sup> James S. Corum and Wray R. Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003), Chap 2, 'Colonial Air Control', pp. 51 - 92.

<sup>139</sup> Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, p. 85.

<sup>140</sup> Corum and Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars*, pp. 66 – 81.

<sup>141</sup> The term 'unconventional warfare' was intentionally chosen by U.S. Special Forces in this instance to highlight US support to the irregular forces of the Northern Alliance Afghan tribes that the U.S. supported to overthrow the Taleban government. JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, (11 Apr 2011), pp. GL-13 – 14.

indigenous allies, re-enforced by precision air power, as constituting a new template for modern war.<sup>142</sup> Biddle conceded that much of what happened in northern Afghanistan during this opening phase of OEF, while asymmetric in character, was also very conventional in execution.<sup>143</sup> The role of US SOF was to advise Afghan leaders, control coalition air power, and coordinate the operations of disparate indigenous armed groups. The value of Biddle's work is that it affirmed the importance of embedded, acculturated airmen, able to integrate the requirements of indigenous ground forces with the processes and procedures necessary to plan for, employ, and assess the effects of modern air power. Biddle provided another affirmation of one of this thesis' key premises—that airmen on the ground and among the indigenous population, gaining and maintaining situational awareness, and able to integrate the full range of air-delivered effects, was a crucial requirement for effective air operations in irregular conflict. Biddle, like the air control advocates between the wars, acknowledged a requirement for some 'boots on the ground', and hinted at the possibility that there may be situations when air power could be the leading element. Biddle's contribution, although a state versus state perspective, is that he affirms what the RAF discovered—that it took knowledgeable airmen on the ground in order to effectively bring the full potential of air power to bear in irregular conflict.

The second, and perhaps the most important contention in this thesis, is that contrary to much of what has been said in the historiography of the air control scheme, even in the recent examinations of the concept, the RAF's efforts to control recalcitrant guerrillas on the edges of the empire clearly showed that the employment of SSOs in and among the subject peoples was significantly more sophisticated than the RAF is given credit for—a point largely

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<sup>142</sup> Stephen Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Nov 2002), p. 1. It needs noting that US Special Forces were structured so that their training, organisation, and operations were focused on irregular conflict in specific regions of the world, with language skills, acculturation, relationships with indigenous leaders, and practical experiences sustained through repeated deployments into the assigned regions.

<sup>143</sup> Biddle, *Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare*, p. 25.

overlooked in most examinations of the era and the scheme. While the use of SSOs should not be seen as adding a layer of humanity to imperial policing and tribal control, for these men were products of their time and reflected the prevailing attitudes of the era towards indigenous peoples, the RAF's efforts were more comprehensive and multifaceted than simply rigid or brutal applications of punishment of those who resisted British colonial control. Over the course of the inter-war period the RAF learned to take a more comprehensive approach, adding breadth and subtlety to the use of aircraft by combining kinetic and non-kinetic actions in order to achieve the desired political effects. Much of what modern commentators suggest is the proper role for air power in modern 'small wars': surveillance, reconnaissance, intelligence gathering, air transport, and army co-operation, can be seen in the work the RAF did over eighty years ago in the Middle East.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

In order to address the key issues, this thesis will synthesise the existing body of literature and then use archival sources to fill in any gaps or to resolve discrepancies between sources. This will offer a more complete and original interpretation and assessment of air power in constabulary, normally irregular, types of operations. It will highlight the significance of kinetic and non-kinetic applications, as well as the importance of military, social, and economic intelligence, as well as cultural understanding in the planning for and delivery of air effects. The thesis will also demonstrate that a subtler and more nuanced understanding of air control during the inter-war period has greater applicability when considering the use of air power in irregular warfare today.

It begins with an examination of the rise of air control as a methodology by the British government, delivered through the newly-created Royal Air Force. It considers the reasons for moving towards what was a controversial and contentious approach to policing the colonies and mandated territories for which Britain gained responsibility in the aftermath of

the First World War. New approaches toward constabulary efforts on the frontiers of the empire were certainly required, since the old methods of dealing with uprisings, insurrections and other violent, localised expressions of dissent against British governance were simply not acceptable, both in terms of the financial costs to the British taxpayers or the potential casualties among British troops in a nation exhausted by the huge losses it sustained during the First World War.

What Britain needed during the inter-war years from the restive tribes and rickety governments in the Middle East and the North-West Frontier was tranquillity and co-operation sufficient to significantly reduce the cost of garrisoning these areas.<sup>144</sup> She also needed a level of stability that allowed the creation and maintenance of safe, reliable, and open commercial air routes to South Africa, the Far East, and India.<sup>145</sup> This was often defined as the locals paying their taxes and not raiding neighbouring tribes.<sup>146</sup>

Iraqi and British restrictions against tribal raiding ran directly counter to Bedouin traditions. Glubb makes the point that raiding was a natural and accepted form of resource management,

In the days of uncontrolled tribal wars, no man need despair of a livelihood, no matter what material disasters might overtake him. He could always recoup his fortunes at the expense of another tribe. Only with the prohibition of raiding, thirty years ago, were poor Bedouins for the first time reduced to hunger and despair.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Keen, 'Gold Medal Prize Essay, 1922 – 23', p. 397.

<sup>145</sup> Gordon Pirie, *Air Empire: British imperial civil aviation, 1919 – 39*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009) offers a comprehensive perspective as to the motivations, pioneering efforts, and imperial politics behind the creation of Imperial Airways and the development of commercial air service to the colonies. Sir Samuel J.G. Hoare, four times the Secretary of State for Air between 1922 and 1940, offers a politician's perspective on the same in *Empire of the Air: The Advent of the Air Age, 1922 – 1929*, (London: Collins, 1957). Sassoon noted that the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930 directed the RAF presence in order to maintain and protect that essential link in the air route to India, in 'Air power in the Middle East', p. 398. TNA AIR 8/57, *Cabinet Committee Notes on the value of the air route between Cairo and Baghdad for strategic and other purposes*, (12 Dec 1922), provides an overview of the motivations behind this initial foray into the future imperial routes between England, Cairo, India, Singapore, and Australia.

<sup>146</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Note on Future Garrison of Palestine*, p. 3.

<sup>147</sup> Sir John Bagot Glubb, *War in the Desert: An R.A.F. Frontier Campaign*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), p. 25.

A rare glimpse of the Bedouin attitude towards traditional raiding is found in a letter from Sheikh Ajaimi bin Suwait of the Dhafir tribe in Iraq. He wrote to the Special Service Officer, Ernest Howes, complaining that raiding was 'hereditary' to the Dhafari culture and enforcing a ban on raiding 'would be difficult.'<sup>148</sup>

Because the actions of the populace tended to be determined by local leadership, it was vital that the British adopt an approach which allowed them to influence decision-makers at the lowest possible levels. Tribal uprisings were not expressions of localised democracy, but of the will of the elders and local leaders who held sway over their communities. This thesis argues that the British responded in an appropriate manner – one which has perhaps not been given sufficient recognition.

David Galula, in *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, makes the case that insurgents, recognising their relative weakness realise it is foolish to fight the government conventionally and thus must 'carry the fight to a different ground where he has a better chance to balance the physical odds against him'.<sup>149</sup> Galula, like many other counter-insurgency theorists and practitioners, proposed that the different ground was the population. More recently, Sir Rupert Smith, like Galula, described the phenomenon of irregular warfare as 'war amongst the people'.<sup>150</sup> As will be discussed, this emphasis on the moral over the physical domain and influencing the decision makers, dominated the RAF's thinking as it applied air power to its imperial policing efforts. The RAF SSOs, by orchestrating the combination of bombing and non-kinetic means to address each local situation, shaped the perceptions and influenced the actions of those indigenous peoples being controlled.

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<sup>148</sup> TNA AIR 23/375, *Ltr from Ajaimi bin Suwait to SSO E. Howes*, 2 Aug 1926. Ajaimi bin Suwait also figures prominently in Glubb, *War in the Desert*, as he was a moderate sub-sheikh who was willing to work with the British colonial officials.

<sup>149</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1964), p. 7.

<sup>150</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, (London: Penguin books, 2006), p. 3.



The thesis moves on to consider the RAF's work in Iraq and Transjordan where the dual elements of the air control scheme, air substitution and air policing, were first tried and then refined, before British politicians and airmen began trying to apply what they had learned in other frontier regions of the empire. Beginning with the political and financial conditions that drove British politicians to attempt the air control scheme, the thesis moves from the Cabinet meetings near the end of the War, the air control experiment in British Somaliland, to the Cairo Conference, and to Sir John Salmond's assumption of command of British forces in Iraq. Where Somaliland and Iraq proved to be successful applications of air control methods, as will be shown, the application of air control in the urban and ideologically charged environment of Palestine was not. And on the North-West Frontier of India, despite one relatively successful instance of independent air operations in 1925, the colonial government chose to limit the RAF to an army co-operation role. The case of Palestine is presented to help understand air control in an environment constrained by social, political, and economic factors. The NWF case study, on the other hand, serves as a good demonstration of air control constrained by internal political factors. The thesis then moves on to an analysis of air control's evolution through the late 1930s, after Trenchard's 'Last Will and Testament', the nickname his staff gave to a 1929 Cabinet Paper he submitted, *The Fuller Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence*.<sup>151</sup>

This is then followed by consideration of how the RAF integrated processes, people, and equipment to execute the air control scheme. It is here that the RAF SSOs' role in executing the air control processes is examined in detail. The chapter was challenging to write because

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<sup>151</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 332 (29), *Note by the Secretary of State for Air*, Nov 1929, circulating *Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff*, Sir Hugh Trenchard, 'The Fuller Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence', (Nov 1929), with accompanying *Supplementary Memorandum Outlining Various Schemes of Air Control*. The nickname is reported in Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 70.

most RAF SSOs rarely wrote much more than was necessary.<sup>152</sup> This may have been because reports from the field were usually transmitted by telegraph or because the primary role of the RAF SSOs in Iraq and Transjordan was to be in the field observing and learning, rather than being in an office writing reports. Thus, while the archives contain large numbers of daily and weekly intelligence summaries and telegrams, they lack depth and the SSO reports tended towards superficial summaries of local activities and such quantifiable data as numbers of sorties flown, weapons employed, and tactics utilised rather than contemporary reflection and analysis on the interaction of government civilians, the military, and police with the villagers.<sup>153</sup> This added to the challenge of interpreting the role of the SSOs, since at first sight it appears to support the kinetic and thus quantitative aspects of the air control scheme that is also the natural predilection of most airmen who tend to be mechanically and scientifically oriented. This in turn has led most researchers and analysts to assumptions about the overwhelmingly kinetic nature of the air control scheme.

An exception to this trend is the writings of Sir John Bagot Glubb, an Army officer who was seconded to the RAF as an SSO. Glubb's books, journal articles, and oral history offer a comprehensive picture by which to interpret many of the drier and somewhat terse operational SSO reports found in the archives.<sup>154</sup> Glubb's survey reports and travel summaries were detailed, accompanied by photographs, and comprehensive. Many were reproduced in *JRCAS*, sometimes under pseudonyms, in order that Glubb might 'compare ideas with my brother officers in the Arab countries'.<sup>155</sup> Unfortunately, Glubb's first books, *A Soldier with the Arabs* (1957), *Britain and the Arabs: A Study of Fifty Years, 1908 to 1958*

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<sup>152</sup> Martin Thomas, 'Bedouin Tribes and the Imperial intelligence Services in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan in the 1920s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 38, no. 4, (2003), p. 550.

<sup>153</sup> The SSO reports are predominantly found in the AIR 23 files at The National Archives, with some also in the AIR 4 and AIR 5 files.

<sup>154</sup> 'His [Glubb's] detailed reports set him apart as a junior officer in the field. ... There, his carefully crafted monthly reports, prefaced with attractive desert photographs, became a vehicle for articulating a vision of desert administration', Fletcher, p. 28.

<sup>155</sup> Fletcher, p. 28

(1959), and *War in the Desert: An RAF Frontier Campaign* (1960) were all written decades after his time as an SSO had ended, in 1930. Gerald de Gaury was another SSO who published accounts of his time in the Middle East, especially his relationship with Ibn Sa'ud, the king of Saudi Arabia. His book on Iraq, *Three Kings in Baghdad: The Tragedy of Iraq's Monarchy*, mentions his time as an SSO, but it was not written until 1961, more than three decades after the fact. In order to better capture the personal perspectives of the men who served as SSOs in Iraq, oral histories found in the Imperial War Museum (IWM) were used to provide insights and to complement Glubb and de Gaury's writings and the SSOs' operations reports.<sup>156</sup>

The oral histories at the IWM provided an informal and unofficial counterpoint to the approved documents found in the official government records. Most of the histories on file were recorded three to four decades after the inter-war period, so recollections of actual events were not as important to the thesis and discerning the attitudes of the pilots, crewmen, and technicians towards the tribal control mission and the indigenous peoples where they served. The oral histories and personal diaries of the aircrews and technicians offered workaday insight into the hardships of barracks and mess life on the frontiers of the empire and the difficulties of flying and maintaining fragile aeroplanes in very austere conditions at the end of a precarious logistic chain.<sup>157</sup> The rank and file perspectives found in the IWM oral histories offer an often uncomfortable reminder of the social context of the inter-war period, a time when attitudes towards indigenous people tended towards 'savages', 'uncivilised', and worse, and air power was seen as a 'civilising influence'. This is a

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<sup>156</sup> IWM 4410, Oral History Interview, Lt Gen Sir John Bagot Glubb, 26 Mar 1979; IWM 4463, Oral History Interview, Maj Gen A.J.H. Dove, 3 Sep 1979; IWM 4465, Oral History Interview, Maj Gen H.P.W. Hutson, 1979; IWM 4488, Oral History Interview, Brig Dennis J.E. O'Flynn, 1979; IWM 4492, Oral History Interview, Brig Edward H. Tinker, 24 Oct 1979.

<sup>157</sup> Examples of the rank and file perspective reviewed include: IWM 875, Oral History Interview, AC Wilfred Page, (aircraftsman in 28 Sqn, India), 14 Jan 1977; IWM 4499, Alfred Earle, (pilot in 55 Sqn, Iraq), 6 Nov 1979; IWM 4549, Spencer Viles, (aircraftsman with 55, 70, and 203 Sqns in Iraq and 11 Sqn in India), 16 Jan 1980; and IWM 4614, Sqn Ldr Ernest Ford, (1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Car Coy in Iraq and Palestine), 25 Mar 1980.

difficult, but necessary understanding of the context of the era for modern analysts seeking insights from RAF imperial policing of the frontier regions between the wars. What was acceptable practice in the 1920s and 30s is not tolerated today, an important caveat as one seeks appropriate lessons from previous tribal control operations in the Middle East and the North-West Frontier.

A new book by military historian and journalist Barry Renfrew attempts to offer ‘the first narrative history of Air Control’ using the oral histories and private papers found at IWM.<sup>158</sup> While there is much to recommend about Renfrew’s treatment of imperial policing from the air, the book suffers from superficial comparisons between the inter-war period and the current wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan, exactly the false comparisons Peter Gray and James Corum warned against.<sup>159</sup> What *Wings of Empire* does contribute to the historiography of air control during the inter-war period is its presentation of the workaday perspectives on imperial policing found in interviews, personal papers, and letters of the rank and file airmen not previously provided by Omissi, Towle, et al. The book also affirms this thesis’ assertion that comprehensive and introspective analyses of the policies and implications of tribal control from the air by the SSOs who were on the ground are lacking and that the bulk of the SSO materials in the archives tends to be quantitative in the reporting and are generally lacking reflective consideration.

The thesis concludes by synthesising what was learned from the research into the key aspects of the various applications of air control within the colonies, protectorates, and Mandates. It is clear that there was much more to the RAF’s efforts than is often popularly portrayed, and, indeed, some of the lessons are appropriate for modern airmen, who might benefit from seeking insights from the RAF’s air control experience. It also demonstrates

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<sup>158</sup> Barry Renfrew, *Wings of Empire: The Forgotten Wars of the Royal Air Force: 1919 – 1939*, (Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2015).

<sup>159</sup> Peter Gray, ‘The Myths of Air Control’, p. 37; Corum, ‘Air Control: Reassessing the History’, pp. 32 – 33.

that although the air control scheme was proposed, tested, and refined before the Second World War, modern understanding of air control is incomplete. This thesis seeks to offer a re-evaluation of how one we should view air power's employment by the British during the period 1920 – 1939.

## Chapter Two

### Air Control between the Wars

The story of air control began as the First World War was drawing to a close. On 15 August 1919, the British War Cabinet drafted what would become known as the ‘ten-year rule’.<sup>1</sup> The essential core of what became the ten-year rule was the statement, ‘... for framing revised Estimates [budgets requests], that the British Empire will not be engaged in any great war during the next ten years, and that no Expeditionary Force is required for this purpose’.<sup>2</sup> The document was short, only one and a half pages of Cabinet Conclusions intended to guide British post-war defence planning. The result, however, had an impact well beyond the brevity of the document.

Historians such as G.C. Peden, John Ferris, and Brian Bond have noted that the ten-year rule forced a tension between the politicians and the Services.<sup>3</sup> Imperialists in the British government maintained that the defence of India and the transportation routes via Egypt and the Middle East were the key to continued British wealth, prestige, and status as a great power.<sup>4</sup> But, post-war exhaustion and economic challenges severely influenced government spending on defence throughout the inter-war period.<sup>5</sup> Brian Bond observed that ‘the urgent

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<sup>1</sup> TNA CAB 23/15, WC 616A, *Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, (15 Aug 1919), p. 1 (hereafter WC616A). It should be noted that the term, ‘ten year rule’ did not come into common use until after the principle had been formally revoked, in John R. Ferris, ‘Treasury Control, the Ten Year Rule and British Service Policies, 1919 – 1924’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 30, no. 4, (Dec 1987), p. 861.

<sup>2</sup> TNA CAB 23/15, WC 616A, *Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy: The Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919 – 26*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 17, George C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury: 1932 – 1939*, (Edinburgh, UK: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), pp. 6 – 8; and Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 23 – 27.

<sup>4</sup> David Killingray, ‘Imperial Defence’, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography*, Robin Winks, ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 347; TNA CAB 24/71/79, GT 6477, *Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff on Air Power Requirements of the Empire*, (9 Dec 1918), p. 1; R.J. Wilkinson, ‘The Geographical Importance of Iraq’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 67, no. 468, (1922).

<sup>5</sup> *The Times* reports on Parliament’s deliberations from the early 1920s are replete with members’ questions and editorials regarding the imperial burdens upon the taxpayers. For example, in discussing Churchill’s introduction of the Army Estimates it noted, ‘the most conspicuous omission in Mr. Churchill’s speech was that he seemed to care very little about the prospective burden on the nation’, *Mr. Churchill and the Army Estimates*, 24 Feb 1920,

need for rapid and drastic financial economies' dominated all other British strategic considerations.<sup>6</sup> The magnitude of Treasury's influence on the Services' Estimates is not clear-cut. John Ferris takes the position that the ten-year rule influenced, but did not dominate British defence policy.<sup>7</sup>

Ferris suggests that the impact of the ten-year rule has been misunderstood by historians and given more credit for controlling Service Estimates than it actually possessed. He noted that,

The Treasury demanded much from the services. Its ability to enforce these demands was limited. ... The core of the Treasury's strength was its position in the formation of budgets and estimates. ... The Treasury could control the services only if the Cabinet let it do so. Since the Cabinet did not do so between 1919 and 1924, Treasury control over the services was weak. ... Between 1919 and 1921 the Treasury did not control any of the services; during 1922 to 1925 it did not control them all.<sup>8</sup>

George Peden, on the other hand, describes a more directive role for the policy, suggesting the Treasury was heavy-handed in its application of the ten-year rule, even to the point of extending it indefinitely in 1928.<sup>9</sup> Whether the rule was merely a strong suggestion or a severe constraint on the Services' ability to perform their assigned missions, the fact remains that the policy did exist and it was applied as and when needed between the wars to shape the Services and British military commitments. In general, the ten-year rule was

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p. 17. This is an interesting charge as the evidence from Churchill's private papers indicates that he very much understood the challenges of taxation on the working classes; for example see CHAR 2/106, *Letter from Churchill to Prime Minister* to tax war profits, cut spending, and seek economies, (4 Apr 1919).

<sup>6</sup> Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, pp. 15 – 17; also Ferris, 'Treasury Control, the Ten Year Rule', p. 873.

<sup>8</sup> John Robert Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy: the Evolution of British Strategic Policy, 1919 – 26*, (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1989), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 7. The rule was not suspended until 1932, after Japan invaded Manchuria.

selectively used as a sliding bracket as the government dealt with the severe economic, social, and fiscal issues of post-war Britain.<sup>10</sup>

Embedded in the War Cabinet direction, WC 616A, were two principles that supported the RAF's proposed air control scheme and its two primary elements, air policing and air substitution. The first principle was the previously mentioned requirement for Britain's military and air forces to garrison the empire.<sup>11</sup> This statement reaffirmed the Army's traditional and primary role as an imperial *gendarmerie* force throughout the colonies.<sup>12</sup>

More importantly, though, it provided Trenchard and the RAF the guidance needed to develop a commensurate, imperial defence role for the post-war Royal Air Force.<sup>13</sup>

According to Andrew Boyle, Trenchard's zeal to preserve the RAF as separate Service, with the political support of Churchill, 'served notice that the traditional preserves of the army were no longer safe'.<sup>14</sup>

In 1923, C.E. Vickery published an article about tactics appropriate for 'small wars' in the *Army Quarterly*. There he reminded the readers that prior to the First World War the Army was continuously engaged in small wars. Attempting to capture the personal aspect of the small wars tradition, he noted,

The soldier of to-day may look round and bemoan the absence of any fresh countries which might afford a potential outlet for his energies and for his training. Certainly the halcyon years of 1880 to 1910 are gone and their equal will not be seen, but there will remain for many years wars and rumours of war on the frontier of India and elsewhere...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> TNA CAB 23/15, WC 616A, *Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, p. 1; also, Churchill's speech to House of Commons, quoted in Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard: Man of Vision*, (London: Collins, 1962), p. 354.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001), p. 210.

<sup>13</sup> T.R. Moreman, "'Small Wars' and 'Imperial Policing': The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919 – 1939", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, (1996), p. 105; and Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919 – 39*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 354.

<sup>15</sup> C.E. Vickery, 'Small Wars', *The Army Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2, (1923), p. 307.



Vickery's comments seem to capture the Army's dilemma—what should they be going forward, a professional, conventional army equipped, trained, and ready for another conventional, most likely mechanised, war against a European opponent or a frontier constabulary?

The professional army Britain ended the war with was contrary to anything the British Army had done in the preceding hundred years.<sup>16</sup> The size of the force and the headquarters structure needed to fight a continental war, plus Britain's political, civil, and social commitment to the First World War, was 'a unique occurrence, even an aberration'.<sup>17</sup> The Army's post-war return to regimental soldiering, with the concomitant emphasis on imperial policing over preparations for a future European war, meant it was 'simply no longer suitable for the demands of modern continental warfare'.<sup>18</sup> As early as 1920, the Cabinet noted that 'the pre-war Army, though organised to meet an emergency on the Continent, had been designed, so far as its strength was concerned, solely with a view to the defence of the Empire'.<sup>19</sup> The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, in 1926, went so far as to say, the 'war against Germany was "abnormal"' and that 'normal wars' were small commitments to be reinforced when necessary by larger formations.<sup>20</sup> In his guidance to the Expeditionary Force Committee CIGS stated that the defence of India was the Army's priority and in keeping with the fiscal guidance, the committee should assume 'a continental war is of extreme improbability'. Moreover, preparations should be for 'operations in an undeveloped country'.<sup>21</sup> The Army's 1922 reply to an examination of British defence requirements stated,

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<sup>16</sup> Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> G.C. Peden, 'The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, issue 2, (1984), pp. 410 – 411.

<sup>19</sup> TNA CAB 24/98, *Conclusions of a meeting of the Finance Committee*, 9 Feb 1920, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 81.

For the last hundred years the British Regular Army has been maintained, not for intervention in a European war, but for the protection of our overseas territories, and British territory at home and abroad. The size of the Army has been regulated by our oversea [sic] commitments, and not by the threat of any Continental Power.... But the *size* [emphasis in original] of the Expeditionary Force had no relation whatever to the strategical problem of a Franco-German conflict.<sup>22</sup>

As part of the transition from a war-time back to a peacetime footing the Army and the RAF were closing stations and ridding the Services of excess equipment. Sir Arthur Harris' biography noted that the primary task for the airmen under his command in the months after the Armistice was to receive and burn great numbers of surplus aircraft, some of them brand new, as the government was keeping production lines open in order to provide jobs and work for the factories.<sup>23</sup> With the ten-year rule providing fiscal guidance and 'widespread public faith that the Covenant of the League of Nations obviated the need for national armies' effectively preventing any thoughtful or serious consideration of potential threats to the survival of Britain proper, the Cabinet focused on ways to reduce the cost of defending the British Empire.<sup>24</sup> The Cabinet concluded that 'the only method of effecting savings on a considerable scale is in the War Departments'.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, however, Trenchard was trying to preserve the RAF's independence as a separate Service in the face of Royal Navy and Army efforts to bring their air arms back under Service control, as well as resentment by the older Services at the added competition for declining defence expenditures.<sup>26</sup> According to John Ferris, application of the ten-year rule allowed the RAF to delay costly preparations for the next European war and concentrate on establishing itself as an equal in imperial

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<sup>22</sup> TNA AIR 8/42, CP 3619, *Memoranda by the War Office on the Report of the Geddes Committee*, (1922), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Probert, *Bomber Harris: His Life and Times*, (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> TNA CAB 23/23, *Conclusions of Cabinet meeting*, (8 Dec 1920), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Sir Samuel J.G. Hoare, *Empire of the Air: The Advent of the Air Age, 1922 – 1929*, (London: Collins, 1957), pp. 54 – 56. Sir Samuel provides his recollections of the internecine battles he faced almost immediately upon taking his seat as the Secretary of State for Air in 1922. In 1929, Sir Samuel noted that his role was to 'preach Trenchard's principles of air power and to establish civil air transport in the Commonwealth and Empire'. *A Short History of the Royal Air Force*, p. 71, found at <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/shorthistoryoftheroyalairforce.cfm> accessed on 13 Dec 2009.

defence.<sup>27</sup> In a note to Sir Eric Geddes, Chairman of the Cabinet Committee for National Expenditure, Trenchard made the point that savings, ‘...could be made if the War Office and Admiralty alike would treat the air service as a partner, and an equal partner, instead of continuously cavilling at air proposals, obstructing their adoption, and considering the air service only as an auxiliary to their own larger forces...’.<sup>28</sup>

The second key principle was that, ‘In order to save man-power, the utmost possible use is to be made of mechanical contrivances, which should be regarded as a means of reducing Estimates’.<sup>29</sup> This directive to seek alternatives to putting soldiers on the ground would eventually provide Trenchard and the RAF an unanticipated opportunity in British Somaliland to demonstrate the utility of air forces as a substitute for ground forces in imperial policing.<sup>30</sup> Trenchard rightly recognised that severe, post-war fiscal constraints would be a major, if not the primary, factor in the future survival of the Air Force. He was determined to demonstrate air forces could police the empire as effectively as the Army, at considerably less cost. In 1921, in response to the War Cabinet’s direction to make use of mechanical contrivances, Trenchard wrote the following to Sir Eric Geddes,

We shall always have to police the Empire, and the intermittent recurrence of these small wars is unavoidable. Prior to 1914 the expense in man power, in lives and in money, was relatively small, and we could perhaps afford ourselves the luxury of treating these problems on what I may be permitted to call ‘Army’ lines, quite apart from the fact that we then had no alternative at our disposal...the time will come – if it has not come already – when our resources will not permit us to uphold our prestige or maintain the empire secure by these outworn methods.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> TNA AIR 8/42, CAS Note to Sir Eric Geddes, Chairman of the Cabinet Committee for National Expenditure, *Further Note on the Economical Substitution of an Air Power for Sea and Land Power*, (3 Nov 1921).

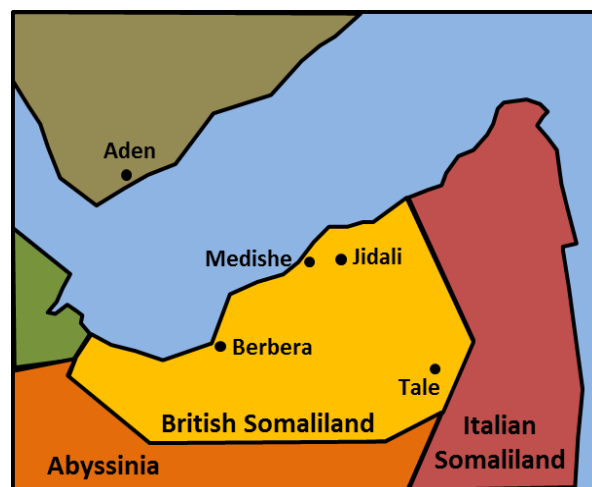
<sup>29</sup> TNA CAB 23/15, WC 616A, *Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> British Somaliland was the north-western part of present day Somalia, across the Gulf of Aden from present day Yemen. Somaliland was originally colonised by the British to help ensure the safety of Aden, a major port and re-supply station on the sea route between Britain and India. Once the Suez Canal opened in 1869, the strategic importance of Somaliland and Aden significantly increased.

<sup>31</sup> TNA AIR 8/42, CAS Archives, *Geddes Committee Memoranda*, Covering note from CAS to Sir Eric Geddes, forwarding *Notes on the Development of Mechanical Warfare in Relation on Man Power*, 3 Nov 1921, p. 2.

## Opportunity

Andrew Boyle's biography of Trenchard relates how during the summer of 1919 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Alfred Milner, asked the Air Ministry for an innovative and cheaper solution to deal with a militant warlord and his Dervish followers that continued to give difficulties to colonial officials in British Somaliland.<sup>32</sup> Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, a radical cleric, had been causing trouble for the



**Figure 2.1,  
British Somaliland, 1919**

British for nearly 20 years.<sup>33</sup> Hassan, known derisively in the British press at the time as the 'Mad Mullah', had organised Dervish opposition to British rule in the region.<sup>34</sup> Four previous land expeditions in the past two decades had failed to achieve any lasting controls on Hassan and the Dervishes. Moreover, the punitive expeditions by the Army had been prohibitively costly in terms of resources expended and in military and civilian casualties.

During the First World War, with nearly all British forces fighting elsewhere, Hassan had consolidated his hold on the eastern region of British Somaliland by recruiting thousands of soldiers and building a series of stone fortresses to control the road networks. A punitive expedition to take care of the Hassan problem was requested by the Governor of the

<sup>32</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 366, and David E. Omissi, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> TNA AIR 9/18, Air Staff Memorandum, *Scheme for Air Control*, (4 Mar 1930), p. 2; also C.A.L. Howard, 'Operations in British Somaliland, 1920', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 60, no. 238, (Jan 1925), p. 129. This was the third in the series of articles of the same name, a public debate in *JUSII* between Howard and Chamier over the efficacy of independent air operations as a means of colonial control.

<sup>34</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 365; Philip Anthony Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The use of aircraft in unconventional warfare, 1918-1988*, (London: Brassey's, Ltd., 1989), p. 12; Jeffrey Bartholet, 'It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World', *Newsweek*, (12 Oct 2009).

Protectorate, Mr Geoffrey Archer, in 1919.<sup>35</sup> The Army was less than enthusiastic about taking on another Somali venture however,<sup>36</sup> and thus submitted what seemed to Milner to be an inflated requirement of two divisions and construction of a railroad across British Somaliland, at the cost of several million pounds, as its proposal for the operation.<sup>37</sup>

The Army's proposal was fiscally, militarily, and politically untenable for the Lloyd George government. It was a fortunate co-incidence that Milner, who had not been an advocate for the Air Force, needed a quick and relatively inexpensive means to discipline the 'Mad Mullah', while at the same time Trenchard needed a way to show how the RAF could substitute 'mechanical contrivances' for ground forces in imperial policing duties.<sup>38</sup> The 'Mad Mullah' issue offered Trenchard a way to demonstrate a strategic role for the Air Force.<sup>39</sup> When Milner asked Trenchard if he had ideas about alternative means of disciplining and controlling the Dervishes, Trenchard proposed an idea he and the Air Staff had already partly planned to allow the Air Force take over the entire operation.<sup>40</sup> Despite opposition from the Army, Milner, with Churchill's blessing, gave Trenchard and the RAF its chance.

It is worthwhile to note that Churchill was enthusiastic about the military potential of the aeroplane and may have been pre-disposed to support Trenchard's gambit.<sup>41</sup> Before the war and despite his wife's reluctance, Churchill took flying lessons, although he never completed

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<sup>35</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'Operations in British Somaliland, 1920', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 54, no. 234, (Jan 1924), pp. 103 – 4.

<sup>36</sup> Chamier, 'Operations in British Somaliland', p. 104; Andrew Gordon, 'Time after Time in the Horn of Africa', *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 74, no. 1, (Jan 2010), p. 140, and Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 366. Also see John F. O'Connell, *The Effectiveness of Airpower in the 20th Century: 1914-1939*, (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2007), p. 178.

<sup>38</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 366.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon, 'Time after Time in the Horn of Africa', p. 140.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon, 'Time after Time in the Horn of Africa', p. 140, and Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Overy, *Churchill and Airpower*, Churchill Archive Education Resources, accessed at <http://www.churchillarchive.com/education-resources/higher-education.html?id=Overy> accessed on 9 Mar 2015.

his licensing.<sup>42</sup> Despite not earning his wings Churchill remained an avid supporter of military and naval aviation throughout his career.<sup>43</sup>

In March 1914, while serving as First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill had commissioned a report on the possible use of aircraft to assist the Army's punitive expeditions in Somaliland.<sup>44</sup> The conclusion by two naval aviators who travelled to Somaliland to evaluate the proposal was that air power could be effective, but they recommended airships rather than aeroplanes as the preferred technology because of the greater reliability and corresponding lower risk to the crews.<sup>45</sup> The First World War intervened however, and Churchill's proposal was not re-addressed until six years later.

According to the operations narrative supplied by Group Captain Robert Gordon, commander of Z-Unit, the RAF squadron sent to conduct the Somaliland operation, eight DH-9A aircraft arrived in Berbera, the capital and main port of British Somaliland, on 30 December 1919, transported via the Royal Navy's seaplane carrier and tender, HMS Ark Royal.<sup>46</sup> Within weeks, the aircraft and crews were ready for operations. The first air attack was carried out against the main camp at Medishe on 21 January 1920.<sup>47</sup> Attacks continued over the following two days against the Dervish fort at Jidali.<sup>48</sup> The three days of bombing forced the Dervishes out of their strongholds and drove them towards the Somaliland Field

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<sup>42</sup> Martin Gilbert, ed., *Churchill: the Power of Words: His Remarkable Life Recounted Through His Writings and Speeches*, (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2012), p. 44. His cousin, the Duke of Marlborough, also urged him to stop the flying lessons. CHAR 1/107/4, 'Letter from The Duke of Marlborough to Churchill', 12 Mar 1913.

<sup>43</sup> Overy, *Churchill and Airpower*; and David Jordan, 'The War They Thought and the War They Got: Royal Navy Concepts of Air Power in the Maritime Environment, 1900 – 1918', p. 4, this is the pre-publication version provided by the author.

<sup>44</sup> CHAR 21/36, 'Proposed aircraft expedition to Somaliland', (20 Mar 1914); also found in TNA CAB 37/119/47, same title and date.

<sup>45</sup> TNA AIR 1/625/17/6, *Somaliland*, 'Report on the possibility of using aircraft in Somaliland', by Lt Cdr F.L.M. Boothby and Lt R.B. Davies, (27 June 1914).

<sup>46</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, Report by Gp Capt Robert Gordon, Commander 'Z' Unit, RAF, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, (May 1920), *Second Supplement to The London Gazette*, 8 Nov 1920. Some sources refer to Gordon's command as 'Z-force', [www.raf.mod.uk/history/raftimeline19181929.cfm](http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/raftimeline19181929.cfm).

<sup>47</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>48</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, p. 4.

Force, a ground force made of up the Somaliland Camel Corps, the King's African Rifles, and a half battalion of Indian grenadiers.<sup>49</sup> For the next two weeks, the RAF conducted co-operative operations with the Somaliland Field Force—providing reconnaissance, communications between elements of the Field Force, medical evacuation, and attacking any elements of the Dervishes they could find and positively identify. Z-Unit aircraft would locate the different field formations and then communicate their locations to the commander of the Somaliland Field by dropping messages and also conveying despatches between the commanders in order to co-ordinate manoeuvres.<sup>50</sup> On 1 February, Z-Unit's 'hospital aeroplane', was first used to evacuate an officer from the field to medical care at Eil Dur Elan.<sup>51</sup> The medical officer, William Tyrell, wrote that over the course of the campaign, three serious cases were further evacuated from Eil Dur Elan to Berbera and five others evacuated from the field, but not admitted to hospital.<sup>52</sup>

During the first week of February, the Z-Unit bombed the Dervishes' fort at Tale [Taleh], approximately 350 km east of Berbera. Z-Unit continued to co-ordinate with and between the detachments of the Somaliland Field Force that were closing on Tale. By 18 February, most of the Dervish forces had surrendered to the British, Hassan had fled to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), and the RAF had flown Mr Archer, the governor, out to meet with local leaders and reaffirm civilian [British] governance in the region.<sup>53</sup> According to the governor, credit for defeating the Dervishes and making Hassan a fugitive '... is primarily

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<sup>49</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Papers of William Tyrell, Imperial War Museum Archives, quoted in M.D. Scholl and C.L. Gesheker, 'The Zed Expedition: the world's first air ambulance?', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 82, (Nov 1989), p. 680.

<sup>53</sup> TNA AIR 20/590, *Air Operations in Somaliland*, p. 9; also in Sir G.F. Archer, 'Despatch on military operations in the Somaliland Protectorate', *Supplement to the London Gazette*, 1 Nov 1920.

due to the Royal Air Force, who were the main instrument of attack and the decisive factor'.<sup>54</sup>

The RAF exercised an 'immediate and moral effect over the Dervishes, who in the ordinary course are good fighting men, demoralising them in the first few days'.<sup>55</sup>

With operations concluded, the Z-Unit returned to their main base at Berbera. F.A. Skoulding, one of the participants in the operation, later wrote in the *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, 'when one remembers that a whole division of troops had previously been unable to subdue the mullah, this early instance of the application of air power stands out as an excellent example of the potency of aircraft in such circumstances'.<sup>56</sup> For the next twenty years, until Somaliland was invaded by the Italians in 1940, the colony enjoyed stability and relative prosperity based upon the economic activities associated with the port of Berbera.<sup>57</sup>

Both the War Office and the Air Ministry interpreted and publicised the results of the Somaliland campaign to best fit their respective political agendas.<sup>58</sup> Major C.A.L. Howard, an Army officer serving with the Somaliland Camel Corps during the operation was particularly condemning of Air Ministry claims, going so far in his lecture to the Staff College at Quetta, published in *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, to state that independent air operations were 'a great mistake and seriously prejudiced the success of the [Somaliland] operations as a whole. ... Used in conjunction with ground troops, aeroplanes were invaluable in many ways, especially in maintaining liaison; but in their independent role they could not and did not obtain important results'.<sup>59</sup> This opinion was publicly taken to

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<sup>54</sup> Sir G.F. Archer, *Supplement to the London Gazette*. Also quoted by Sir. B.H. Liddell Hart in a 3-part series of articles, 'Air Control in Practice', in the *Daily Telegraph*, 23 – 25 May 1930.

<sup>55</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 48, C.D. 81, *Notes on the History of the Employment of Air Power*, (Aug 1935), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> F.A. Skoulding, 'With Z-Unit in Somaliland', *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 3, (July 1931), p. 396.

<sup>57</sup> From the memoirs of Leo Amery, at the time the Under-secretary of State for the Colonies, quoted in Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 369.

<sup>58</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 16, and Gordon, p. 142.

<sup>59</sup> C.A.L. Howard, 'Operations in British Somaliland, 1920', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 53, no. 231, (Apr 1923), p. 218.



task by Air Commodore J.A. Chamier in the *JUSII*, which was then further rebutted by Major Howard in the Jan 1925 issue of same journal.<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Army highlighted the supporting and subordinate role of the air forces, while the RAF pointed to the Air Force's ability to achieve decisive results against an unsophisticated opponent—an early edition of the roles and missions debates that seem to re-occur each time policies or budgets force the Services to constrict.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the different interpretations of the results, the reality was that over about two months Z-Unit showed that an RAF squadron could deploy from Britain and made a credible case that an air force could discipline unruly natives just as well as could the Army. More importantly than substituting air power for ground forces during punitive expeditions though, especially from the perspective of the British Cabinet, was that the total cost of the Somaliland operation had only been £70,000.<sup>62</sup> In a government driven by a near-obsessive need to cut expenditures, yet reluctant to alter its status as a colonial power, this Somaliland campaign was successful beyond some politicians' expectations.<sup>63</sup> The Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, a staunch opponent of independent air force operations, grudgingly admitted the RAF was able to achieve more than what the Army had accomplished before the war and at 1 – 2% of the cost.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the most optimistic

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<sup>60</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'Operations in British Somaliland, 1920', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 54, no. 234, (Jan 1924); and C.A.L. Howard, 'Operations in British Somaliland, 1920', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 60, no. 238, (Jan 1925).

<sup>61</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond on the Royal Air Force in India*, (Aug 1922), p. 1. This is Salmond's report of an inspection tour he conducted to investigate allegations of poor conditions and misuse of the RAF by Army commanders in India. The report, which was presented to the British Viceroy in India, refers to the successful air operations in Somaliland to emphasise the potential savings and lost capabilities by failing to maintain and continued misuse of the RAF. The same report is found in the Chartwell Papers at Cambridge, CHAR 17/29, with a covering memo from Trenchard to Churchill added.

<sup>62</sup> TNA AIR 8/42, *CAS Note to the Geddes Committee on the Cost of the Operations Carried out in Somaliland in 1920*, (2 Nov 1921), p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> TNA CAB 23/23, *Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet*, (8 Dec 1920), p. 3. '...curtailing military expenditures to the utmost extent compatible with the fulfilment of our Imperial obligations and national safety', p. 3; and Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 369.

<sup>64</sup> The Army's estimate for the cost of the expedition was between £6 million and £7 million. J. Salmond, *Royal Air Force in India*, (1922), p. 1. See also TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 48, *C.D. 81*, p. 3.

assessment came from then Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Leopold Amery. In his memoirs, Amery called the Somaliland campaign the ‘cheapest war in history’.<sup>65</sup> But one successful venture was not enough to demonstrate the strategic utility of the RAF. In order to survive as an independent Service, the savings realised by substituting the RAF for ground forces in Somaliland needed to be projected onto other imperial policing opportunities. And, because economic considerations helped shape British policies between the wars, especially with regards to imperial policing, the cost savings realised in Somaliland created a willingness by the Cabinet to try aerial substitution elsewhere, even if not fully in agreement with Trenchard’s air control scheme.

### **Capitalising on the Success**

On 19 February 1920, as Z-Unit was concluding operations in Somaliland, Trenchard received a Minute from Churchill’s office asking if the RAF was ‘prepared to take on Mesopotamia’ and offering to announce the proposal in Parliament the following Monday if the RAF was up to the task.<sup>66</sup> Trenchard accepted Churchill’s offer and on 29 February Churchill wrote directly to Trenchard asking him to ‘without delay, submit a scheme and state whether you consider the internal security of the country [Mesopotamia] could be maintained by it [the Royal Air Force]’.<sup>67</sup> In this memorandum, Churchill offered Trenchard two important incentives: first, that an airman would be appointed as the Commander-in-Chief for all British forces in Mesopotamia and second, offering to increase the RAF budget by £5 – 7 million.<sup>68</sup> Trenchard realised that these two elements would constitute tangible evidence as to the government’s faith in the equality of the RAF as a policing force and an

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<sup>65</sup> Rt. Hon. Leopold S. Amery, *My Political Life, vol. II, War and peace, 1914 – 1929*, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1953), p. 202.

<sup>66</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Minute from Wg Cdr Scott, Acting Secretary to Secretary of State for War and Air, to CAS*, (19 Feb 1920), p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, Letter from Churchill to Trenchard requesting the Air Force submit a scheme for maintaining the internal security of Mesopotamia, (29 Feb 1920), p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, Letter from Churchill to Trenchard, (29 Feb 1920), p. 2.

airman's ability to effectively command both ground and air forces. With these incentives offered and enjoying the success of Z-Unit's operations in Somaliland, less than two weeks later, on 12 March, Trenchard delivered *A Preliminary Scheme for the Military Control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force* to Churchill.<sup>69</sup> In his covering memorandum which forwarded Trenchard's proposal to the Cabinet, Churchill referenced the RAF's previous success and the low cost of the Somaliland expedition as justifying his proposal to give responsibility for policing Mesopotamia to the fledgling RAF.<sup>70</sup>

Mesopotamia presented the British with some difficult challenges.<sup>71</sup> It had been a province of the Ottoman Empire and not a British colony before the war. As a result of the political manoeuvrings by Britain and France before and during the war to limit Russian expansion, and to further its own ambitions in the Middle East and South Asia, Britain needed a compliant Mesopotamia as a geographically and politically stable link between India and Egypt. Churchill, at least on paper, noted that the solution to governing Iraq would require collaboration between the British and the Iraqis. In 1921, when the Secretary of State for the Colonies, he said, '...I have from the outset contemplated holding Mesopotamia not by sheer force but by the acquiescence of the people of Mesopotamia as a whole in a Government and ruler whom they have freely accepted, and who will be supported by the Air Force...'<sup>72</sup> The political aspirations of Hussein, Sharif of Mecca, which at the time was not part of what is modern Saudi Arabia, aided British desires for the region. Hussein and his

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<sup>69</sup> TNA CAB 24/106, CP 1320, *A Preliminary Scheme for the Military control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force*, (12 Mar 1920). The CAS memorandum, without Churchill's forwarding memorandum is also found at AIR 8/34 and AIR 9/14.

<sup>70</sup> TNA CAB 24/106, CP 1320, *Minute by the Secretary of State for War Covering four Memoranda*, (20 May 1920).

<sup>71</sup> The name Mesopotamia is from the ancient Greek and means the land between the two rivers. During the Islamic conquest in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries the area was called Iraq by the Arabs. Under the Ottomans, the name reverted back to Mesopotamia, and finally in 1922 the name changed again, back to the Arabic title when the modern nation of Iraq was created. After the Cairo Conference, Churchill had to keep reminding his staff to use the Arabic name, Iraq, instead of the Greek name, Mesopotamia.

<sup>72</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3197, *Policy and Finance in Mesopotamia, 1922-23*, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, (4 Aug 1921), p. 3.

sons, Abdullah and Feisal, were willing to cooperate with and assist the British to secure the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula in order to maintain their ruling positions.

As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, Mesopotamia and other sections of the Ottoman Empire were mandated (assigned) to Britain and other victors of the First World War.<sup>73</sup> According to *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, the European powers were to help the former colonies of the Ottoman Empire transition to self-rule. Britain was given responsibility for Palestine and Transjordan, at the time a single province, and Mesopotamia. France was mandated Syria and Lebanon by the San Remo Treaty in 1920 which implemented the League of Nations Covenant.<sup>74</sup>

As the British Cabinet looked to the future, restoring and preserving the empire, especially the ties to India, and maintaining control of the Suez Canal in Egypt, were seen as key to Great Britain's future position in the world.<sup>75</sup> Other imperial territories and the Dominions may have had military, commercial, or prestige value; however the cost to maintain a worldwide network of colonies that were a net drain on the Exchequer or required significant military garrisons to maintain some sort of acceptable peace were viewed with no small measure of scepticism.<sup>76</sup> Post-war Britain had little appetite for further military adventures and a large, conscript army, nor were the economy or the Army in sufficient shape

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<sup>73</sup> *Treaty of Versailles June 28, 1919: Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22*, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University Law School. Accessed at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp) on 3 June 2010.

<sup>74</sup> *San Remo Resolution*, (25 Apr 1920), Primary Sources by Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C. Accessed at [www.cfr.org/israel/san-remo-resolution/p15248](http://www.cfr.org/israel/san-remo-resolution/p15248) on 23 July 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 5 – 42; John Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial policy between the wars', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 23, issue 3, (1980), pp. 659 – 660; Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, p. 31; Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918 – 1922*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 38.

<sup>76</sup> David Hunter Miller, 'The Origin of the Mandate System', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 2, (Jan 1928). Accessed at [www.foreignaffairs.com](http://www.foreignaffairs.com) on 22 June 2013. Miller was a lawyer and the technical advisor to the American Commission at the Paris Peace Conference.

to sustain far-flung colonies that did not contribute to the growth or prosperity of Great Britain.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the economic and military challenges, regaining some semblance of control over the disparate colonies and territories while also fulfilling its obligations in the Mandates, were seen as primary responsibilities for Britain as a global leader.<sup>78</sup> Thus, how to balance domestic issues with global responsibilities was a source of frequent debate in the Cabinet and also in the major newspapers.<sup>79</sup> In January 1919, during a meeting of the executive committee forming the League of Nations, Lloyd George stated that the cost of maintaining over one million British and colonial troops to keep peace in the colonies and newly occupied territories ‘would be something enormous’.<sup>80</sup> The Prime Minister informed the conference that the British people would not accept the cost of controlling the former German and Ottoman colonies and that there was a grassroots sentiment that the ‘British Empire was “big enough”’.<sup>81</sup> The more sceptical among Britons questioned the value returned to the British people by those regions where desirable natural resources or lucrative markets for British products were scarce, but threats to internal stability and requirements for large garrisons were great.<sup>82</sup> Anthony Clayton makes the point in *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919* – 39, that for the first decade after the war the public was strongly anti-military and pacifist.<sup>83</sup> Evidence of this sentiment includes Britain becoming one of the signatories to the Kellogg-Briand Pact. This treaty had as its first article the renunciation of war as an instrument of

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<sup>77</sup> Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 11; and Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 112.

<sup>78</sup> Darwin, ‘Imperialism in Decline’, pp. 659 – 660.

<sup>79</sup> See for example, *The Times*, ‘Report from House of Commons’, (24 June 1920), p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> D.H. Miller, ‘The Origin of the Mandate System’.

<sup>81</sup> D.H. Miller, ‘The Origin of the Mandate System’.

<sup>82</sup> *The Times*, ‘Reckless Waste’, an address by H.H. Asquith, former Liberal Prime Minister, (21 June 1920).

<sup>83</sup> Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 251.

national policy.<sup>84</sup> It was not until 1936, after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and German re-occupation of the Rhineland that public mood in Britain began to change.<sup>85</sup>

In the first few years after the war, the 'British press was almost unanimously hostile to the continued occupation of Iraq'.<sup>86</sup> *The Times* published a series of four articles with the leading headline, 'The Development of Mesopotamia...Exaggerated Hopes...The Orgy of Waste'.<sup>87</sup> Other editorials posed rhetorical questions such as, 'How much longer are valuable lives to be sacrificed in the vain endeavour to impose upon the Arab population an elaborate and expensive administration which they never asked for and do not want?'<sup>88</sup> In 1923, the *Daily Mail* sent a special correspondent, Sir Percival Phillips, to Mesopotamia to 'investigate the facts as to our occupation'.<sup>89</sup> Phillips' reports, published with titles like 'The Millstone Round the Taxpayer's Neck' and 'Tax-Collecting by Bomb', highlighted the government's primary challenge, justifying the financial and physical costs of the occupation.<sup>90</sup> The Middle East, even with the possibility of future oil revenues, was a region of the empire where the cost-benefit analysis was questionable.<sup>91</sup>

Complicating British post-war manoeuvring for territory, Bolshevik Russia began to seek access to those regions formerly controlled by the Ottomans and where it had been

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<sup>84</sup> *Kellogg-Briand Pact, Article 1*, Yale University Law Library: The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. Accessed at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kbpact.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kbpact.asp) on 19 Dec 2013. 'The High Contracting Parties solemnly declare in the names of their respective peoples that they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it, as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another.'

<sup>85</sup> Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, pp. 9 – 10; G.C. Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy; From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 104

<sup>86</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 31.

<sup>87</sup> Sir George Cunningham Buchanan, a civil engineer who had served with the British Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia during the First World War. From 23 – 26 Sep 1919, *The Times* published four articles by Buchanan titled 'The Development of Mesopotamia'. This was the headline of the first of the four articles.

<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, editorial, (7 Aug 1920).

<sup>89</sup> H.W. Wilson, in the preface to Sir Percival Phillips, *Mesopotamia: The "Daily Mail" Inquiry at Baghdad*, (London: Carmelite House, 1923), p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Percival Phillips, *Mesopotamia: The "Daily Mail" Inquiry*, pp. 11 – 19.

<sup>91</sup> TNA AIR 5/168, C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, Mar 1920, (June 1921); TNA AIR 8/57, *Advance notes from the Colonial Office to the Cabinet Committee on Iraq*, (11 Dec 1922), Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 36.

denied access during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, a resurgent, post-Ottoman Turkey was consolidating its power under Kemal Ataturk and seeking to mitigate the losses it had suffered as a result of the First World War. And, France saw new opportunities to expand its influence in the Middle East with the demise of the Ottoman Empire.

Within the May 1920 staff package forwarding Trenchard's *Preliminary Scheme for the Military Control of Mesopotamia by the Royal Air Force* to the Cabinet was Churchill's assessment of the security situation in Mesopotamia and the costs of maintaining imperial control.

Each of these distant forces must be strong enough to resist every conceivable attack. All of them are supplied by long lines of communication... All along these lines of communication garrisons have to be established, each of which must be strong enough to resist the maximum potential force that could be brought to bear... The result of this vicious system is that a score of mud villages, sandwiched in between a swampy river and a blistering desert, inhabited by a few hundred half naked native families, usually starving, are now occupied ... by Anglo-Indian garrisons on a scale which in India would maintain order in wealthy provinces of millions of people.<sup>92</sup>

The debate in the Cabinet was impassioned.<sup>93</sup> John Darwin observed, 'Bitter arguments raged inside British government over the costs of Iraq ... and the shoestring empire of "hot air, aeroplanes, and Arabs".'<sup>94</sup> Although Churchill presented the case for air control in fiscal terms, the Army felt compelled to dissent with its civilian leadership and offered an imperial security perspective to defend its position. The Army countered Churchill's fiscal austerity

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<sup>92</sup> TNA CAB 24/106, CP 1320, *Memorandum by Secretary of State for War*, (1 May 1920), p. 1. See also Andrew Roe, 'Flying in the Blazing Sun: Air Control, District Intelligence Officers and Mixed Results', *British Army Review*, no. 159, (Winter 2013 – 14), p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline', p. 659; Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, pp. 13 – 14; and Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 252.

<sup>94</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830 – 1970*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 318. The 'hot air and aeroplanes' quote is attributed to Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1918 to 1922, in Keith Jeffery, 'Sir Henry Wilson and the defence of the British Empire, 1918 – 22', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 5, issue 3, (May 1977), p. 286.

points by raising the spectre of external threats to the region from Turkey and Russia.<sup>95</sup> The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, further opposed Churchill's position and made the somewhat far-fetched suggestion that Turkish and Russian aggression in Mesopotamia constituted a direct threat to the British Isles. Wilson maintained that a large ground force was required to keep the peace in Mesopotamia and Palestine.

Owing once more to our Turkish Treaty which, even at this date, contains no frontier between Turkey and Armenia; owing to our very ill-defined relations to the Kurds and Arabs; owing to our Foreign Office commitments in Persia; owing to the deplorable weakness in our own Administrative Services and the consequent depletion of our fighting units to such an extent that many of them exist only on paper; and finally owing to the steady advance of Bolshevism to the south and the fall of Denikin, the Cossacks, the Caucasus and—I do not know what next—our position in Mesopotamia is none too secure even with the garrison we now have in that theatre.<sup>96</sup>

During the negotiations to create the League of Nations, the Allies made a decision to not grant the Hashemite Arabs the independence they believed had been promised for supporting the Allies against the Ottomans. Instead, the Allies granted provisional recognition to those Arab parts of the former Ottoman Empire which were fairly developed and established a timetable via the Mandates for helping the former Ottoman territories achieve independence and become successful modern states. The Mandate system also allowed the Allies, overtly in the case of France or unofficially in Britain's case, to expand their colonial presence and control in the region. The League of Nations Covenant justified the Europeans' actions with paternalistic rhetoric and mandated that the British and French provide advice and assistance to the native governments until such time as the Allies deemed they were ready for full independence.

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<sup>95</sup> TNA WO 33/969, *Cause of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia*, with a covering foreword by Field Marshal, Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office, covering a secret paper by the General Staff, (26 Oct 1920), p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> TNA CAB 24/106, CP 1320, *Minute by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff*, (6 May 1920), p. 1.



To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.<sup>97</sup>

Sharif Hussein and the Arabs who had supported the British felt a sense of betrayal when the post-war peace conferences failed to follow through on the promises of independence.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, the Kurds, located predominantly in northern Iraq, had expected to be granted self-determination after the war, but their ambitions were blocked by competing Turkish, Russian, British, and French interests. Jean Allain, in *International Law in the Middle East: Closer to Power than Justice*, noted that during the preparations for the peace conference the British failed to mention Kurdistan as one of the states that should be included as one of the post-war Mandates.<sup>99</sup> Although Kurds are ethnically distinct from Arabs and Turks, there had never been a recognized state known as Kurdistan. What may have hurt the Kurds' case for a nation of their own, perhaps more so than any lack of precedent for an independent Kurdistan, was that there was no single leader able to represent the interests of the different Kurdish factions to the Allies and to whom the British could rely on as a compliant native ruler.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22.*

<sup>98</sup> TNA WO 33/969, *Cause of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia*. This feeling of betrayal is understandable given that British information operations during the war had promoted a message of Arab nationalism and opposition to the Turks among the Arab elements of the Ottoman Army, Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914 – 1918*, (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1998), p. 149.

<sup>99</sup> Jean Allain, *International Law in the Middle East: Closer to Power than Justice*, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2004), p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly: How Winston Churchill Created Modern Iraq*, (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, Inc., 2004), p. 66; Gareth Stansfield, 'The Kurdish Question in Iraq, 1914 – 1974',

The Minutes from the Council of Ten, the central body of major powers during the deliberations to create the League of Nations, noted that during the early sessions to draft the Covenant of the League of Nations Lloyd George acknowledged,

He had left out one country in Turkey which ought to have been inserted. He did not realize that it was separate. ... He referred to Kurdistan (sic), which was between Mesopotamia and Armenia. Therefore, if there was no objection, he proposed to insert the words 'and Kurdistan'.<sup>101</sup>

The other major powers at the League of Nations conference rejected Lloyd George's proposed amendment and the Kurds were assigned to the British Mandate of Iraq, but kept separate from the Iraqis for administrative purposes.

The Arab Revolt in Mesopotamia began during the summer of 1920, motivated in part by the broken promise of Arab independence.<sup>102</sup> At the time, there were only two squadrons of aircraft available in Iraq, with a third squadron expected from Egypt. In July, the British Army and the RAF began conducting a conventional, punitive campaign to quell the fighting. The Army's assessment of RAF contributions to the operations was complimentary, but still they maintained that air power's primary contribution remained as an adjunct to the ground forces—reconnaissance, communications between field elements, aerial fires to support manoeuvre, distant attacks (interdiction), and providing air transport and medical evacuation. Trenchard disagreed with the Army's assessment and countered by suggesting that the RAF's use of demonstrations and bombing had made significant contributions to subduing the tribes, disrupting enemy formations before they were able to attack British troops, and pursuing defeated insurgents to ensure they did not re-group and counterattack.<sup>103</sup> A year later, during

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*The Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914 – 1974*, (Reading, UK: Thomson Learning EMEA Ltd., 2006), p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Allain, *International Law in the Middle East*, p. 16.

<sup>102</sup> TNA WO 33/969, *Cause of the Outbreak in Mesopotamia*. Also in Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, pp. 78 – 80; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, pp. 31 – 32; and Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 120.

<sup>103</sup> Assessment by Lt Gen Sir A. Haldane, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, in AIR 9/14, *The Work of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, Note by Chief of the Air Staff*, Air Marshal Sir H. Trenchard, (18 Feb 1921), p. 9. Demonstrations as a threat of possible force were shown to

the 1922 – 23 fighting season, when the Army sent two columns of troops against Turkish irregular forces in Kurdistan, transport aircraft dropped ‘barley, boots, and ghee [clarified butter]’, along with radios, horse shoes, and 7,500 pairs of socks to re-supply the columns on the march. The RAF also evacuated 250 British soldiers suffering from dysentery, saving the soldiers a long, arduous, and dangerous land journey back to the hospital at Hinaidi, the main British base in Iraq at the time.<sup>104</sup>

The commander of the British Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Lt Gen Sir Aylmer Haldane, concluded his report on the Arab Revolt by stating, ‘...aeroplanes as an auxiliary to troops on the ground are of great value, but I do not consider that as a primary force they have the qualities which will enable them without the assistance of land forces to bring into subjection tribes who have committed themselves to insurrection’.<sup>105</sup> The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff concurred with Haldane’s assessment that ‘aircraft cannot to any great extent replace troops as the permanent controlling force in the government of the country’.<sup>106</sup> Trenchard refused to concede the point and in his conclusion to the report he noted the successes the RAF had achieved through threats of force and aerial attacks despite the demands of supporting the ground formations with such a small air force.<sup>107</sup> To

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stabilise situations and dissuade the locals from joining the opposition elements. R.A. Cochrane, writing about operations in Aden, said, ‘The ability of aircraft to demonstrate over an area has had a tranquillizing effect, and has enable numerous small disputes to be settled before they have developed into serious affairs’. ‘The Work of the Royal Air Force in Aden’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 76, no. 501, (Feb 1931), p. 97. Likewise, TNA AIR 9/49, *Air Staff Notes and Comments on Report by G.O.C. Sudan, concerning the Utility of R.A.F. on Patrols S.8 and S.9 in Southern Sudan*, (1927), para. 4, notes the effectiveness of demonstrations on the locals. Ritchie’s survey of TNA AIR 27/112 and AIR 27/113 revealed that in Aden, ‘simple demonstration of firepower on several occasions proved sufficient to bring dissident tribal factions into line’, *The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies in the Middle East, 1919 – 1939*, (RAF High Wycombe, UK: HQ Air Command, 2011, p. 43.

<sup>104</sup> H.N. Hampton, ‘Co-operation of Land and Air Forces in Kurdistan, 1923’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 72, (May 1927), p. 827. The author was a participant in the operations.

<sup>105</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *The Work of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, Report by Lt Gen Sir A. Haldane, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, with notes by Air Staff*, (19 Feb 1921), p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *The Work of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, Note by Deputy Chief of Imperial General Staff, with reply by the Chief of the Air Staff*, (19 Feb 1921), p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> Interestingly, a year later the report by the Acting Commissioner for Iraq, A.T. Wilson, to the Cabinet stated, ‘The utility of the Air Force as a primary force has been to some extent vitiated by the fact that owing to a shortage of aeroplanes and owing to the fact that they have generally been used as auxiliaries and in insufficient

emphasise the RAF's position, Trenchard played up the fiscal concerns raised by Churchill and made a point of including in his assessment that the gains achieved by the land forces came at 'enormous expenditure of money and considerable sacrifice of life' and that events had shown a small air force was able to 'control a country of this kind economically without the use of large military columns'.<sup>108</sup> Trenchard also offered the principle that formed the basis of the air control scheme and guided the employment of British air power through during the inter-war period, '...the Royal Air Force in sufficient strength and correctly used will undoubtedly, with the assistance of local levies, be able to undertake a great deal of the work which in the past has been done by the Army'.<sup>109</sup> The evidence implies that Trenchard, with Churchill's approval, offered that the air control scheme '*can only be proved if it is tried*' [emphasis in the original], thereby setting Churchill up to propose a full test of air control at the upcoming Cairo Conference.<sup>110</sup>

In March 1920, after Trenchard delivered the *Preliminary Scheme* to the War Office, Churchill forwarded it to the rest of the Cabinet with his opinion that Britain should 'start on the control and development of Mesopotamia from an entirely different point of view'.<sup>111</sup> Recognising that responsibilities for the Middle East were divided among different departments, for example, Palestine and Transjordan were assigned to the Foreign Office and Iraq was assigned to the Secretary of State for India, the Cabinet debated consolidating

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numbers...' in TNA CO 730/13, *The Use of Air Force in Mesopotamia in its political aspects and as to its utility actual and potential in support of the civil government of that country*, (26 Feb 1921), p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Air Staff Notes on The Work of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, Report by Lt Gen Sir A. Haldane, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force*, (19 Feb 1921), p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, CAS Note in *The Work of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, Note by Deputy Chief of Imperial General Staff*, (19 Feb 1921), p. 10.

<sup>110</sup> AIR 9/14, *The Work of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, Note by Chief of the Air Staff*, (18 Feb 1921), p. 11.

<sup>111</sup> TNA CAB 24/106, CP 1320, *Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, Mesopotamian Experience*, (20 May 1920), p. 2.

responsibilities for the region in a new, Middle East Department under the Colonial Office instead of under the Foreign Office.<sup>112</sup>

That same month, almost a year before the Cairo Conference, the Secretary of State for India identified the need for a separate department to address the unique concerns of the Middle East. In a memorandum to the Cabinet, the India Office noted that the relationship with the Arab Mandates was different than that with the other colonies, other sovereign nations, or British protectorates. 'Our position falls far short of sovereignty or even suzerainty, and our duties will, it is hoped, be transitory and diminishing'.<sup>113</sup> The memorandum goes on to suggest possible solutions and concludes by recommending a new, Middle East Office be established under the Secretary of State for the Colonies. During the discussions, the Secretary of State for India stated,

It has always appeared to the India Office that the proper solution of the difficulty lies in the creation of a new Department (the 'Middle East Office' might be a suitable designation) to control our relations with all the areas in the Middle East with which we have now been brought into direct contact. These would comprise Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, the whole Arabian Peninsula (including the Gulf littoral, Oman, the Aden Hinterland and the Hejaz), Palestine, Syria (in so far as concerns British interests in that area), Armenia and Kurdistan. Egypt and the Sudan would naturally pass under the control of the same Department. Probably also Persia, with whom the agreement of 1919 has brought us into a new relationship which, while it certainly does not amount into a protectorate, falls short of the diplomatic equality that existed (in theory at any rate) in past.<sup>114</sup>

Tellingly, the India Office's memorandum made the point that the Mandates were neither colonies nor territories and needed to be handled differently. These new responsibilities, the memo said, could not be considered colonies and 'nothing should be done to encourage the

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<sup>112</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 1402, *Mesopotamia and Middle East: Question of Future Control*, (2 June 1920); Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 88 – 90; Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 40; Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, p. 77; and Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 378.

<sup>113</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 1402, *Question of Future Control*, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 1402, *Question of Future Control*, p. 1. This proposal from the Secretary of State for India was part of a series of documents, *British Military Liabilities*, (15 June 1920), circulated by Churchill while he was the Secretary of State for War and Air.

belief that a mandate is merely annexation in disguise'.<sup>115</sup> Churchill skilfully used the India Office memo, plus all the earlier memoranda to reinforce his proposal to transfer responsibility for maintaining order in Mesopotamia to the RAF as soon as suitable arrangements could be made. Continued resistance from the Army and the Royal Navy, however, delayed a decision on the air control proposal.

In February 1921, Churchill gave up his Cabinet posting as the Secretary of State for War and Air and replaced Lord Milner as the Secretary of State for the Colonies. With Lloyd George's blessing, one of Churchill's first acts was to implement the new Middle Eastern Department under the Colonial Office and consolidate all responsibilities for Palestine, Transjordan, and Mesopotamia there.<sup>116</sup> In addition, he secured permission and funding to gather together and consult with all responsible 'civil and military officials in the areas whose control had been transferred to the Colonial Office', plus notable scholars and experts in the affairs of the Middle East. The conference, planned for Cairo, would include T.E. Lawrence; Gertrude Bell, a brilliant Arabist, Lawrence's sometime collaborator, and the only woman in an official capacity at the conference; Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner for Iraq; and Sir Arnold Wilson, the Colonial Administrator for Mesopotamia during and after the war. Also attending were the Iraqi minister of war, Ja'far al Askari, and the Iraqi minister of finance, Sasun Effendi. Churchill's purpose for the conference was to develop a framework for Britain's political, economic, and military future in the region and also to establish the means of achieving substantial reductions in the cost of administering the Middle Eastern part of the empire.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 1402, *Question of Future Control*, p. 3.

<sup>116</sup> Proposed in TNA CAB 24/107, CP 1402, *Question of Future Control*, and approved by the Cabinet on 31 Dec 1920.

<sup>117</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921*, (11 July 1921), p. 3. Same report is also found in TNA AIR 8/37.

After the Cairo Conference's first session on 12 March 1921, the strong personalities that defined the participants were divided into two working groups, political and military, with the primary goal of discovering how to manage the Mandates while saving as much money as possible. During the working groups, Trenchard, with Lawrence's assistance and Churchill's backing, argued to allow the RAF to test the air control scheme in Iraq.<sup>118</sup> Other attendees, such as Gertrude Bell and Arnold Wilson, thought the air policing scheme doomed to failure, but finally acquiesced to Churchill's wishes. In *Dreamers of the Day*, Mary Doria Russell cleverly captures the cynic's position when Gertrude Bell observes, 'It will cost less for the British to fail from the air than from the ground. And fewer soldiers will die for the mistakes of politicians'.<sup>119</sup> Not surprisingly, Bell's observation has survived to the present in appraisals of air power's unique appeal for politicians seeking 'swift and economical solutions to messy and complex problems'.<sup>120</sup>

### **The Cairo Conference, March 1921**

Both Churchill and Trenchard needed the air control scheme to work. Churchill's political fortunes still had not fully recovered from the stigma of Gallipoli<sup>121</sup> and even though the Armistice had been signed, British troops were still engaged in Russia, Persia, Turkey, Ireland, and the North-West Frontier of India. Churchill needed a way to address the war debt and reduce the costs of policing the empire in order for the government to fund the social programmes that had been promised to the returning veterans and British citizens who

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<sup>118</sup> Klieman, *The Cairo Conference*, pp. 111 – 112.

<sup>119</sup> Mary Doria Russell, *Dreamers of the Day*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), p. 152.

<sup>120</sup> Colin Gray, *Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Research Institute, Mar 2009), p. 49; but also Tony Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal*, (London: Brassey's, Ltd., 1994); Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Revolution in Warfare? Air Power in the Persian Gulf*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994); and Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., 'Making Revolutionary Change: Airpower in COIN Today', *Parameters*, Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, (Summer 2008).

<sup>121</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p.22, 'Churchill's main concerns at this stage appears to have been personal: he sought to pull off a dramatic coup to revive his somewhat unsteady political fortunes'; Peter Hart, [www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/gallipoli\\_dday\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/gallipoli_dday_01.shtml), accessed on 25 May 2014; and Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, p. 91, references how Lloyd George saved Churchill's political career.

had sacrificed so much. Trenchard, on the other hand, recognised the opportunity and took it as the means to save the RAF as an independent Service. J.A. Chamier, an ardent advocate for Trenchard's vision of independent air power, attempted a positive spin on the acrimony between the Services after the war, suggesting that the challenges of austerity, imperial obligations, and Service roles provided 'stimulus to thought' as to the possibilities of air power, which eventually led to new uses for air forces, including 'maintenance of order in the wild lands of the Empire frontiers'.<sup>122</sup>

Churchill accepted that policing poor, desolate, and unproductive Mandates in the Middle East was likely to be extremely unpopular in Parliament and among common Britons, especially if the effort continued as an expensive and difficult undertaking in a time of shrinking military budgets, increasing domestic demands, and other costly military commitments. Both Sir Percy Cox and General Haldane were of the mind that it would take thousands of troops to restore order and control Mesopotamia. If cost savings were Britain's goal, they recommended pulling back from the distant outposts and even considered completely leaving the Middle East. Churchill, upon examining his options and looking at future possibilities for the region, primarily oil to fuel the Royal Navy, determined to make major cuts in Mesopotamia in order to gain necessary fiscal savings rather than leaving the Middle East outright.<sup>123</sup> The estimated cost to garrison Mesopotamia in the 1920-21 fiscal year was £33 million, too high a price to pay, but one Churchill could not avoid unless an innovative means of policing the empire was implemented. In a letter to a constituent in his home district, Churchill wrote,

...the disadvantages and even disgrace of such a procedure [abandoning Mesopotamia] should not be under-rated. We marched into Mesopotamia during the war and uprooted the Turkish Government which was the only stable form of government in that country

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<sup>122</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'England and Air Power', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 2, (Jan 1935), pp. 311 – 12.

<sup>123</sup> TNA CAB 24/98, *Army Estimates 1920-21, Cost of Garrison in Iraq*, (9 Feb 1920), pp. 1 – 2; and Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 20.



at that time. We accepted before all the world a mandate for the country and undertook to introduce much better methods of government in the place of those we had overthrown. If, following upon this, we now ignominiously scuttle for the coast, leaving sheer anarchy behind us and historic cities to be plundered by the wild Bedouin of the desert, an event will have occurred not at all in accordance with what has usually been the reputation of Great Britain.<sup>124</sup>

The work of the Cairo Conference is well documented in the National Archives and also by Aaron S. Klieman and Christopher Catherwood.<sup>125</sup> Klieman takes a comprehensive look at the Cairo Conference in terms of the competing political, social, and economic, as well as the military, issues facing Churchill and Britain in the region. His focused and in-depth approach used the personal papers of some of the notables Churchill had invited to participate: Trenchard, Cox, Haldane, Lawrence, Bell, and Arnold Wilson, for example, to explain the influence these strong personalities had upon the working groups, discussions, and final results of the conference. Catherwood's work provides a different perspective by looking at the events and motivations leading up to and during the conference through the prism of Churchill's eyes. His extensive research using Churchill's Chartwell Papers provided the perspective of the central figure at the Cairo Conference. Catherwood spends less time on the military aspects of the conference, instead focusing on the political and financial issues Churchill was so keen to address. Omissi also discusses the Cairo Conference, but from the military perspective of those who saw the air control scheme as a means to preserve the RAF as an independent air force in the challenging economic era of the 1920s.<sup>126</sup> Taken together, the three works provide a comprehensive examination of the conference. A short synopsis however, will aid the reader's understanding of the context and the importance of the conference to Churchill and Trenchard's scheme for air control.

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<sup>124</sup> Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, p. 120, quoting from the Chartwell Papers, Churchill Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge.

<sup>125</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference Report*; Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921*; and Christopher Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*.

<sup>126</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, pp. 25 – 26.

While the Cairo Conference formally opened on 12 March 1921, the political manoeuvring and sparring by memoranda had begun much earlier. As early as August 1919, Trenchard had proposed that ‘since the Armistice ... events in the Near East and India have tended to show that against a semi-civilized enemy unprovided [sic] with aircraft, aerial operations alone may have such a deterrent effect as to be practically decisive’.<sup>127</sup> In February 1920, Churchill told the House of Commons that the RAF should lead the security and policing efforts in Mesopotamia, and more shockingly for the Army, recommended that the General Officer Commanding (GOC) in Mesopotamia should be an airman in order that the full effects of the air arm could be applied by one who best knew the capabilities and limitations of air power. If implemented, the RAF would effectively usurp a position, GOC of all British forces in a theatre of operations, which had been traditionally reserved for Army officers.<sup>128</sup> That possibility was not met with ‘open arms’ by the Army’s senior leadership.

During heated Cabinet debates after the conference, the Army pushed back against the Colonial Office’s plan to give responsibility for imperial policing in Mesopotamia to the RAF. In June 1920, the War Department and the Air Ministry both submitted numerous memoranda highlighting British military shortcomings and liabilities across the globe. One of the more disturbing points from the Army noted that Britain had ‘absolutely no reserves whatever (in formations) with which to reinforce our garrisons in any part of the world where an emergency may at any moment develop without warning’.<sup>129</sup> Andrew Boyle recounts one Cabinet meeting in late 1920 when the Prime Minister asked Trenchard why he seemed so sure the air scheme would succeed in Mesopotamia when Sir Percy Cox was adamant that air power would be the ‘worst possible instrument of pacification’. Trenchard responded that

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<sup>127</sup> TNA AIR 8/2, *CAS Memorandum on Status of the RAF*, 14 Aug 1919; also Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 22–23.

<sup>128</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 21.

<sup>129</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 1467, *British Military Liabilities*, 15 June 1920, circulating a *Minute by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff*, 9 June 1920, p. 1.

Cox was only echoing the views of his Army advisors and would change his opinion once he saw what air power could do with his own eyes.<sup>130</sup>

Despite being thinly stretched across the empire, facing reduced budgets, and having to reduce force structure to pre-war levels and lower, the Army strongly resisted consideration of the Air Ministry's air control proposals.<sup>131</sup> In a very pointed rebuttal to Lord Balfour's report on the *Part of the Air Force of the Future in Imperial Defence*, the Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, made the point that for airmen to prepare campaigns against opposing armies they would be required to duplicate the Army's existing headquarters and intelligence staffs, which would be a waste of already scarce funding and manpower.<sup>132</sup> In addition, the Secretary of State for War contended that any venture by the Air Force would require the full support of the Army's transportation and administrative services...unless, of course, the Air Ministry proposed to duplicate those as well.<sup>133</sup>

The parochialism was palpable. Great Britain and the Army could not afford to maintain battalions for colonial policing duties in Mesopotamia, Palestine, Transjordan, and elsewhere in the face of post-war budget realities. The Army however, had no intention of allowing the RAF any chance of assuming responsibility for imperial policing because success, if it did happen, would add credence to the Air Force's claim for independence. The War Office's parting shot in the debate was noteworthy. In a September 1921 memorandum, the Secretary of State for War rebutted Lord Balfour's report point by point, even going so far as to accuse the RAF of being an 'instrument of terrorism' and warning that public opinion would not abide by a Service that was only able to police the empire by 'bombing women and

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<sup>130</sup> Boyle, *Trenchard*, p. 378.

<sup>131</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Covering note from Air Ministry to the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, (23 Jan 1922), offers a chronological recap of the War Office's actions to stymie the air control scheme in Iraq. Also see Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 68; Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 52.

<sup>132</sup> TNA AIR 5/552, CID 149C, *Secretary of State for War Memorandum, The Part of the Air Force of the Future in Imperial Defence*, (26 July 1921).

<sup>133</sup> TNA AIR 5/552, CID 150C, *Secretary of State for War Memorandum, The Air Force in Relation to the Army and Navy*, (28 Sep 1921), p. 4.

children'.<sup>134</sup> The Secretary of State for War concluded his criticism of the report and the Air Force with,

Consideration of the above facts makes it abundantly clear that neither in the sphere of Air Defence nor in that of savage warfare is there any justification for the segregation of the Royal Air Force under a separate Department of State, the intervention of which must inevitably complicate administration, hamper operations and deplete the funds so sorely needed to keep all machines in the air for the maintenance and expansion of a superfluous department.<sup>135</sup>

Such vitriolic opposition to the Air Force would continue throughout the inter-war years, including the CIGS' 'hot air and aeroplanes' slur, even though by 1922 or 1923, the independence of the Service was assured.<sup>136</sup> Rather than being grateful to the RAF for relieving them from the financial and manpower burdens of policing the 'wilder' parts of the empire, the Army continued its niggling parochialism and fuelling misunderstanding as to air power's potential contributions.<sup>137</sup>

In the professional forums before the Cairo Conference, eloquent airmen, veterans of the First World War, had already begun the campaign to develop support for the air substitution scheme and policing the empire from the air. As noted in an earlier chapter, only fifteen months after the end of the war, A.E. Borton presented a lecture, 'The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars' to RUSI based in part upon his experiences flying in support of Lawrence and the Arab irregulars during the 1917 – 18 Palestine campaign.<sup>138</sup> Borton described nine general characteristics of what he called 'small wars' that were fully consistent with the primary contemporary work on the subject, Callwell's, *Small Wars: Their Principles &*

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<sup>134</sup> TNA AIR 5/552, CID 150C, *The Air Force in Relation to the Army and Navy*, p. 5; also in diary of Sir Aylmer Haldane, 14 Jan 1921, quoted in Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 153.

<sup>135</sup> TNA AIR 5/552, CID 150C, *The Air Force in Relation to the Army and Navy*, p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> After the war the 'older' Services fought to regain control of their air services. According to the official RAF history, RAF independence was 'reasonably assured' by 1923. *A Short History of the Royal Air Force*, p. 57. *Flight*, on the other hand, records that 'the future of the independent Royal Air Force is assured' on 23 Mar 1923 in its discussion of the Admiralty withdrawing its efforts to regain control of the Royal Naval Air Service, p. 170.

<sup>137</sup> Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 70.

<sup>138</sup> A.E. Borton, 'The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 65, no. 458, (May 1920).

*Practice*.<sup>139</sup> In addressing each of the nine characteristics, Borton offered a possible role for current and future aircraft.<sup>140</sup> He proposed that the inherent characteristics of air power: speed, range, and flexibility, had the potential to make aeroplanes a ‘decisive factor in quelling at the outset a disturbance which might otherwise lead to serious and prolonged operations’.<sup>141</sup> Borton’s lecture provided an early look at potential role for aviation as a preventative measure—stopping a rebellion before it grew to such a point that it would require a major commitment of troops and treasure to bring the situation back under control.

In January 1921, Leslie Gossage presented a lecture to RUSI originally written by his friend, J.A. Chamier. This lecture, ‘The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons’, presented a case for substitution of Army battalions by air forces. With Air Commodore Brooke-Popham, who in 1922 would become the first commandant of the RAF Staff College at Andover, supporting the presentation, Gossage and Brooke-Popham made the point during the post-lecture discussion that substituting air power for battalions had the potential to reduce the size of the garrison in Mesopotamia from 47,000 to 7,900 troops, an 83% reduction in forces, with concomitant reductions in sustainment costs and both friendly and civilian casualties.<sup>142</sup> These were powerful arguments in the climate of post-war fiscal retrenchment, even if they were not fully accepted by all attending.

Controlling Mesopotamia was a two-part challenge. The first question was how to maintain control of a population with three distinct ethno-religious characters—Shi’a Arabs in the south, Sunni Arabs in the centre, and Sunni Kurds in the north. The second part of the

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<sup>139</sup> C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>140</sup> Borton, ‘The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars’, pp. 313 – 316.

<sup>141</sup> Borton, ‘The Use of Aircraft in Small Wars’, p. 312.

<sup>142</sup> J.A. Chamier, ‘The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons’, (12 Jan 1921), *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 66, no. 462, (May 1921), p. 208. Although Chamier wrote the lecture and had intended to deliver it at RUSI, he was called away at the last minute and Wg Cdr Gossage, another decorated, war-time air commander, delivered the lecture. Chamier’s article has been used over the years to damn the RAF for advocating ‘brutal’ tactics against the tribes during the 1920s.

challenge was finding an Arab leader willing to rule Mesopotamia in concert with the British.<sup>143</sup> At Lawrence, Bell, and Cox's urging, Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein, was accepted as Britain's choice to become the king.<sup>144</sup>

According to Catherwood, substituting RAF squadrons for Army battalions as the policing force in the region had been agreed-to in principle before the conference.<sup>145</sup> Both the High Commissioner and the GOC in Mesopotamia had reluctantly agreed to the basic tenets of the revised military policy that gave the RAF responsibility for controlling Iraq. In 1919, when Churchill had made it clear that 'further reductions in the forces in Mesopotamia would be required', Haldane responded, '...after making a thorough inspection of my command from end to end, I was puzzled to discover a means whereby those reductions could be effected'.<sup>146</sup> In 1921 though, writing to Churchill, Haldane admitted, 'Indeed, I now think that had I had sufficient aircraft last year I might have prevented the insurrection spreading beyond the first incident at Rumaithah'.<sup>147</sup> And as Trenchard had predicted, success convinced Sir Percy Cox that substituting aircraft for battalions could be an effective means of imperial policing. Later, in 1925, while Cox was chairing a lecture at RUSI by Sir John Salmond, Cox admitted his earlier opposition to the air control scheme prior to and during the Cairo Conference had been wrong.<sup>148</sup>

With the decision to implement the air control scheme a fait accompli, Churchill proposed that British troop withdrawals could begin as soon as possible and the RAF could assume responsibility for controlling the tribes and policing the region. Cox cautioned that

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<sup>143</sup> Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 2008), p. 160.

<sup>144</sup> Meyer and Brysac, *Kingmakers*, pp. 160 – 61.

<sup>145</sup> Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, p. 128.

<sup>146</sup> Sir Aylmer Haldane, 'The Arab Rising in Mesopotamia, 1920', 29 Nov 1922, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 68, (1923), p. 68.

<sup>147</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Extracts from a private letter from General Haldane to Mr. Churchill*, (25 June 1921). Also found in TNA AIR 8/34, same title, and TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Note 13, Appendix B. The wording is similar to that used in Haldane's Nov 1922 lecture to RUSI, p. 68, previously cited.

<sup>148</sup> J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 498.

rapid reduction of troops would 'leave him in a very difficult position and he emphasised the necessity for the maintenance of troops until such time as the new [Arab] force was trained and ready, which could not be before 1922'.<sup>149</sup> While Churchill agreed that the situation was difficult, he replied that the 'British taxpayer could not be expected to continue to garrison the country at such high expense and that rapid economies must be effected before the new financial year'.<sup>150</sup>

Trenchard's role at the Cairo Conference, then, was to convince the other attendees to accept the air control scheme based upon the projected financial savings to be gained. While not exactly the strategic role that Trenchard and other airmen had envisioned for British air power, by accepting responsibility for imperial policing duties during peacetime they hoped to assure the RAF's survival in a period of austere budgets and give the RAF the opportunity to demonstrate that airmen could be as effective as theatre commanders (joint force commanders in the modern vernacular) as any soldier. According to David Ian Hall, 'Success in this role [imperial policing] to a large degree preserved the RAF's independence in the early twenties'.<sup>151</sup>

On 16 March, Trenchard presented the air control scheme to the Military and Financial Committees at the conference. He was greatly aided by T.E. Lawrence who lent his considerable reputation as an expert on Arab culture and desert warfare, to push for air substitution as an effective means of imperial policing in the Middle East. As the key players at the conference had previously accepted air substitution based on the potential for fiscal savings, Trenchard won the opportunity to demonstrate that the RAF was a necessary,

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<sup>149</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 49.

<sup>150</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 49.

<sup>151</sup> David Ian Hall, *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1919 - 1943*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), p. 19.

independent Service, equal to the Army and Royal Navy. The Military Committee minutes reflected Trenchard's view of the Air Force's future role,

The Conference recommended that ... consideration should be given to the vital necessity of preparing and training an Air Force adequate to war requirements, the importance of testing the potentialities of the Air Force, the need for giving to superior officers and staffs experience in independent command and responsibility, and the provision of an all-British military and commercial air route to India.<sup>152</sup>

Trenchard had overcome a major hurdle. He had gotten the proposal past the military obstacles, although the air scheme still had to pass judgement by the rest of the conference attendees. Here, Lawrence was most useful in garnering support, using his personal experiences with aeroplanes and Arab armies from the war as convincing arguments as to the effectiveness of air power in an environment such as was Mesopotamia at the time—relatively flat, vast uninhabited regions with few urban areas, long distances between villages, harsh terrain, and predominantly nomadic peoples. Later on 16 March, at the joint meeting of the Political and Military Committees, chaired by Churchill, it is recorded,

The CAS's scheme for the control of Mesopotamia was considered by the Committee. ... The Committee accept in principle the CAS's scheme. The Committee explored alternative avenues, but came to the conclusion that the only means by which a reduction from the twelve battalion to the four battalion scheme could be effected was by the measures set forth in the CAS's scheme.<sup>153</sup>

Churchill had his plan to reduce military costs in the Mandates and Trenchard had a venue to prove the Air Force could be equal to the Army as a policing force. Now, what the RAF had to do was prove that air substitution could deliver the operational results, as well as the hoped for savings.

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<sup>152</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 73; and TNA CAB 24/122, CP 2866, *Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12 to 30, 1921*, (Apr 1921), p. 3.

<sup>153</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, pp. 73 – 74.



## Chapter Three

### Air Control in Practice

Even though air substitution and colonial policing by air forces had been approved by the Cairo Conference, Churchill still needed to gain the approval of the Cabinet before the RAF would be allowed to implement the air control scheme. Although the conference was intended to address and allay any political, economic, and military concerns, the Cabinet did not immediately embrace the scheme when Churchill and Trenchard presented the plan's fiscal details and proposed manpower reductions. Dissent against the air control scheme continued despite the compromises and conciliations that had been agreed to in Cairo.

The Army was the principal opponent to air policing and reducing the size of the garrison in Iraq, right up to 1 October 1922 when responsibility for military operations in Iraq passed to the RAF. Although the Army was seriously overstretched by the other defence commitments across the empire—Irish unrest, Turkish threats to Mosul oil fields, and the expedition to put down the Red Army in Russia, the Secretary of State for War pressed to retain the large garrison in Mesopotamia and the traditional, ground-centric, means of controlling the population.<sup>1</sup> Comparing the size and composition of the garrisons proposed by the two Services offers insight into how the Army and the Air Force each approached the problem. The Army's memorandum noted that both estimates were based on the same assumptions: no external aggression to Iraq and no serious internal uprisings by the tribes. The two Services' proposals for Iraq were as follows:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> TNA CAB 24/128, CP 3395, *Memorandum from the Secretary of State for War, The Situation in Iraq*, (12 Oct 1921), p. 3. This memorandum from Worthington-Evans offers the Cabinet an appreciation of the military situation in Iraq. TNA CAB 24/129, CP 3494, references CP 3395 and continues to build the picture of a Turkish threat to Iraq.

<sup>2</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum (ASM) 48, *C.D. 81, Notes on the History of the Employment of Air Power*, (Aug 1935), p. 7. This comparison of capabilities was directed on 16 Mar 1921, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Joint Political and Military Committee at the Cairo Conference, TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921*, (11 July 1921), p. 73.p. 7.

Air Control  
 1 British infantry battalion  
 3 Indian infantry battalions  
 1 Indian pack battery  
 8 squadrons RAF  
 Armoured cars  
 Local forces

Army Control  
 2 British infantry battalions  
 10 Indian infantry battalions  
 2 Indian pack batteries  
 6 squadrons RAF  
 Armoured cars  
 1 Cavalry regiment  
 1 Royal Field Artillery battery  
 1 Sapper & Miner company  
 Local forces

Worthington-Evans discounted Churchill and Trenchard's projected savings in funds and manpower, writing, 'There is, in my opinion, no possibility of a reduction of expenditure being thus accomplished', because the RAF would still have to maintain a basing and support structure.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he raised the question of air power's efficacy as a tool for controlling guerrillas, couching his argument in terms of air power's humanity, while neglecting to mention the equal, if not greater, collateral damage and civilian suffering that was commonplace and fully accepted as part of punitive expeditions conducted by land forces against 'savages and semi-civilised races' or the deterrent effect expected of battalions policing the less developed or rougher regions of the empire.<sup>4</sup>

Although RAF doctrine, policy, and practice sought to mitigate casualties among civilians, charges of inhumanity would continue to plague the RAF throughout the inter-war period.<sup>5</sup> The fact is, the British were an occupying power in the colonies and Mandates.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> TNA AIR 8/34, *CAS Archives on Iraq, 1925-1926*, CP 3240, *Memorandum from Secretary of State for War, Policy and Finance in Mesopotamia*, (17 Aug 1921), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> TNA CAB 24/127, *Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, Policy and Finance in Mesopotamia*, (17 Aug 1921), p. 1. The humanity of the air control scheme has been an issue for modern scholars examining Britain's track record in the Middle East and Africa. See for example David Killingray, "'A Swift Agent of Government': Air Power in British Colonial Africa, 1916-1939", *Journal of African History*, vol. 25, (1984); David Omissi, 'Technology and Repression: Air Control in Palestine, 1922-36', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, (Dec 1990); and Priya Satia, 'The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia', *American Historical Review*, vol. 111, no. 1, (Feb 2006).

<sup>6</sup> TNA CO 730/13, A.T. Wilson, the acting Civil Commissioner in Iraq from 1918 – 20, bluntly stated what could easily have been said for every colony, 'The maintenance of order involves the use of armed forces', *Note*

Thus, anti-imperialist media of the time were willing to spin a phrase to suit their bias. Even the pro-empire *Daily Mail* reported, ‘of course, innocent people have been killed; that cannot be helped. The subjugation of an unruly village or district involves the punishment of old women as well as recalcitrant head men’.<sup>7</sup> Such reporting was unfortunate because the emotional perspective coloured the argument and encouraged the Army to not consider alternative solutions to imperial policing. As will be shown in the next chapter, over the course of the inter-war period the RAF developed a range of air power applications, many of them not involving bombs and bullets, in order to influence the ‘targeted audiences’ and achieve desired responses. Still, the RAF felt compelled to publish official documentation to counter ‘many of the depreciatory statements regarding the efficacy of air power’ among ‘ill-informed circles’.<sup>8</sup> The Army, though, maintained the characterisation of air policing as a brutal and indiscriminate because that position furthered their desire to eliminate the new Service and to strengthen their position in the budgetary battles.

Worthington-Evans, who after the RAF’s successful operations in Somaliland, had reluctantly admitted the RAF was able to achieve decisive results at a fraction of the cost of an Army expedition, completely reversed that concession when Churchill and Trenchard proposed the air control experiment in Mesopotamia. The Secretary of State for War suggested it was ‘undesirable and uneconomical to allow the Air Force to depart from its present function of an ancilliary [sic] service’.<sup>9</sup> Compromise and accommodation with the RAF seemed to be beyond the Army’s ability or willingness. Perhaps because they perceived the RAF as a threat to their long-held, traditional role as the guarantor of imperial stability, or

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*of use of Air Force in Mesopotamia in its political aspects and as to its utility actual and potential in support of the Civil Government of that country*, (26 Feb 1921), p.1. Same note is found at TNA AIR 9/14 and AIR 8/34.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Percival Phillips, *Mesopotamia: The “Daily Mail” Inquiry at Baghdad*, (London: Carmelite House, 1923), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 48, C.D. 81, *Notes on the History of the Employment of Air Power*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Omissi, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 27.

it may have been Army unwillingness to create a precedent for giving up a GOC position to another Service, the Army resisted the air control scheme politically in the Cabinet and later, physically, during the hand-over of command in Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1921, Churchill and Trenchard continued to push the air control scheme for Iraq within the Cabinet. Despite the War Department's opposition, the 'argument of the purse' eventually won out. Desperate to start realising the fiscal economies promised and hoped for, the Cabinet approved an air control 'experiment' in Mesopotamia to begin in October 1922. It would take a year for the Air Force to put everything in place: squadrons of aeroplanes, RAF armoured car companies, intelligence structure, support and maintenance units, and a headquarters, but the RAF now had its opportunity to prove or deny that aeroplanes could effectively and inexpensively substitute for Army battalions as a constabulary force policing the less-developed regions of the empire. The Army grudgingly accepted the decision, but decided it was not compelled to help the RAF succeed.<sup>11</sup>

Though the Army's obstructionism was disappointing, the situation did not dissuade the RAF. In October 1922 Sir John Salmond was installed as the overall commander of British forces in Iraq. The air control experiment was on. The Army immediately reduced the garrison to four battalions (two British and two Indian), plus 15,000 Iraqi Levies (predominantly Assyrian Christians), and supporting arms. The RAF moved eight squadrons of aircraft and recognising that air control was an air-land effort, also created Air Force

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<sup>10</sup> TNA AIR 5/552, CID 135-C, *Confidential Covering Memorandum from the Secretary of State for Air, The Part of the Air Force of the Future in Imperial Defence*, (Mar 1921), and CID 139-C, *Secret Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, The Role of the Air Force in Relation to the Army*, (26 May 1921). See also Anne Baker, *From Biplane to Spitfire: The Life of Air Chief Marshal Sir Geoffrey Salmond*, (Yorkshire, UK: Leo Cooper, 2003), p. 174.

<sup>11</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, *Memorandum*, 23 Jan 1922, p. 16; Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, pp. 61 – 62; and Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard: Man of Vision*, (London: Collins, 1962), pp. 387 – 388. TNA CAB 23/29, *Conference of Ministers*, 8 Feb 1922, describes the Army's obstinacy regarding support for the RAF's air policing scheme.

armoured car companies to replace the British battalions.<sup>12</sup> Further reductions in the garrison would occur in the ensuing months and years until the cost of garrisoning Iraq dropped by almost 75% in fiscal year 1929-30.

Equally important to successfully implementing the air control scheme was the RAF's effort to build an 'efficient intelligence system... whereby the earliest possible information may be given of any signs of disorder or rebellion, so that the Air may be able to take militant measures and check it in its incipient stage'.<sup>13</sup> From the very beginning of the experiment, Salmond and the RAF brought together the three elements needed to ensure success: aircraft and crews to establish a ubiquitous presence throughout the region, armoured car companies on the ground and focused efforts from the air to provide the power to compel compliance, and an operational intelligence structure to gather, analyse, and exploit information necessary for effective operations, as well as establish expectations and shape perceptions among the local tribesmen against whom any influencing actions would be directed.<sup>14</sup> Sir Basil Liddell Hart suggested that the RAF's scheme would be better described as 'air and armour control', recognising the important role the armoured car companies played supporting and reinforcing the actions of the aeroplanes and political officers.<sup>15</sup>

It should be remembered that one of the key assumptions from both the Cairo Conference and the British Cabinet regarding implementing the air control scheme was that

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<sup>12</sup> Trenchard's proposal to implement the scheme approved at the Cairo Conference very clearly emphasised the integrated, air-land aspect air control. 'It must be clearly understood that the provision of the armoured car and tank companies is an integral part of the Air Force Scheme of control', TNA AIR 9/14, Memorandum from AM Sir H. Trenchard to Secretary of State, (28 July 1921), *Arrangements for Defence of Iraq by the Royal Air Force*, p. 2. TNA AIR 8/34, *Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, (1 Aug 1924), pp. 1 and 5, presented to Parliament after the first full year of the air control 'experiment' describes the integration of air and land forces in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph; and Sir John Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 70, no. 479, (Aug 1925), p. 485.

<sup>13</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 77, and re-enforced in TNA AIR 9/14, ASM 20, *Lecture by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond to the students of the staff college, Quetta*, undated (circa 1923), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control, A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College*, (Apr 1933), pp. 10 – 12.

<sup>15</sup> This is originally in chapter 7, 'Air and Empire: The History of Air Control', pp. 139 – 161, in B.H. Liddell Hart's *The British Way in War*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), also quoted in Omissi, *RAF and colonial control*, p. 61, no citation given.

there would be no external threats to Iraq.<sup>16</sup> The air control scheme was intended to address ‘ordinary spasmodic disturbances’, but was primarily intended for internal control.<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, Sir Percy Cox reminded Churchill in August 1922 that the air control scheme was based upon peace with Turkey and an Iraqi Army of 15,000 men. Because those conditions had not been met he repeated his previous advice to delay substituting squadrons for battalions, especially at that moment due to the risk of a Turkish invasion.<sup>18</sup> Still, Churchill and Trenchard pressed on. They had to keep pushing as both had staked their respective futures on the success of the air control scheme. By the time Salmond had assumed command of imperial forces in Iraq, the Turks had already crossed the border to threaten the autonomous Kurdish provinces of northern Iraq, had begun stirring up the Persians along the north-eastern border with Iraq, and were supporting Kurdish separatists led by Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji in the Sulaimaniyah region.

Over the next year, the RAF and the Army combined to drive the Turks out of the Kurdistan region and back to Turkey or into Persia. They also forced the Kurdish rebels to submit to British-led Iraqi rule. Each time the RAF and the Army forced a Turkish column out of an area, Iraqi police units and Iraqi and British government officials were flown in to assume control and to demonstrate that the Iraqi government and their British advisors fully intended to exert their combined authority. In the first 3 months the RAF flew 200 sorties across a 100 mile front, conducting reconnaissance, strike, re-supply of ground units, and medical evacuation sorties. By early summer, all Turkish units had left Iraq and Sheikh Mahmud had surrendered. More importantly, Kurdish tribal leaders quickly disavowed their

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<sup>16</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 74, and TNA CAB 24/122, CP 2866, *Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12 to 30, 1921*, (Apr 1921), p. 3. Also in J. Salmond, ‘The Air Force in Iraq’, p. 485.

<sup>18</sup> TNA AIR 20/9109, *Paraphrase telegram No. 578 from High Commissioner of Iraq to the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, (17 Aug 1922).

allegiance to the Turks and agreed to comply with the British rule of law.<sup>19</sup> Cox admitted his previous concerns regarding the ability of the RAF to push back the Turks had been wrong. He wrote to Churchill, 'It is difficult to exaggerate the improvement of the political situation....The impression that the return of the Turks was imminent has now vanished and this has had great effect in Baghdad, Mosul and among the Euphrates tribes'.<sup>20</sup>

Once peace had been restored and external threats to Iraq were removed, Salmond and the RAF turned their efforts to proving that Trenchard and Churchill's scheme for maintaining internal order with aeroplanes could work. They began substituting aeroplanes for the Army battalions that had been policing the Iraqi tribes. The Cabinet, equally anxious to begin the air substitution experiment and realise the promised savings, ordered the Army to begin bringing the soldiers home as soon as transports could be arranged. Salmond and his staff had to develop a local interpretation of the Air Ministry's air control scheme.

The RAF took a 'comprehensive approach' in setting up its constabulary role in Iraq, noting that tribal control required 'a sufficient Intelligence Service, and a very close liaison with political and police officers'.<sup>21</sup> Salmond wrote of consulting with local British advisors and police, and acquiring the assistance of local political officers, in order to develop an appropriate, 'whole-of-government' system to compel the sheikhs to comply with the government's requirements.<sup>22</sup> In order to explain how air forces co-operated with political officers in Iraq, the Air Ministry reported to Parliament that,

no air operations [were] in any circumstances initiated except at the request of the local British civil adviser acting in concert with the local Iraqi Administration, and after that request has been considered and approved in succession (a) by the Minister of the

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<sup>19</sup> J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 493.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 493. Cox was in the chair for this presentation at RUSI and did not dispute the quotation.

<sup>21</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 77, discusses the need to create an 'efficient intelligence system' and the interaction of air forces and political officers; a point Salmond emphasises in TNA AIR 9/14, ASM 20, *Lecture by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond to the Students of the Staff College, Quetta*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 492.

Interior in the Iraq Government and his British adviser and (b) by the High Commissioner. ...personal consultation is secured between local British advisers and intelligence officers and the political and air authorities at Baghdad.<sup>23</sup>

Including civil administrators and political officers who had the local knowledge and relationships helped the RAF build its understanding and gain the cultural awareness they needed to implement an effective air policing operation.

British and Iraqi civil authorities, with the help of the RAF, began the air control experiment by building a comprehensive map showing where the 42 major sheikhs and their tribes were generally located. Then, the Iraqi government summoned all 42 to a conference in Samawah. Only one sheikh appeared. The next day, RAF armoured car detachments were despatched to forward depots and three forward operating bases for aircraft were established in areas where the most important tribes were sure to see them. On the following day, air operations against the tribes began.

Aircraft dropped leaflets explaining that the sheikhs had been summoned to consult with the government of Iraq but had failed to appear. The messages also reminded the tribes of the consequences likely to befall them if the sheikhs continued to resist the government's requests. The people were informed that their homes and flocks would be bombed and strafed until their tribal leaders met with the government. The messages worked and within another day, without firing a shot, all 42 sheikhs had surrendered and agreed to meet with Iraqi and British officials.<sup>24</sup> By ensuring that the presence of the aeroplanes and armoured cars was conspicuous, reminding the tribes of the RAF's power, and ensuring the sheikhs perceived that the government was willing to apply the full effects of air power should they not comply, the government was able to achieve its objectives without dropping a bomb or firing a shot.

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<sup>23</sup> TNA AIR 8/34, *Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 496.



In 1922, early in the air control experiment, the aeroplane's relative novelty in the frontier regions gave it an inherent mystique. The tribes' unfamiliarity with the capabilities and the limitations of the technology aided the political officers' positions. The threat of air attack, plus the difficulty of defending against those attacks, was usually enough to compel the sheikhs to comply with the government's demands. Salmond addressed this issue in his post-command report, detailing the results of the experiment,

It has sometimes been said that the effect of air actions on the tribesmen, at first very great, rapidly wears off as he comes to realise that the number of casualties caused by it is small. It can be emphatically stated that the reverse has been our experience in Iraq. Here familiarity has increased its power. At first the tribesman sees that the casualties it inflicts are few and fails to realise that it is in other ways that its pressure will bear upon him. As air action has become better known there has been a steadily decreasing tendency to offer resistance once the intention of the Government to enforce obedience by active measures has been made clear.<sup>25</sup>

Some analysts, such as David Omissi, challenge long term effects of aerial bombardment, pointing out how German and Japanese citizens adapted to Allied bombings during the Second World War.<sup>26</sup> Sufficient evidence exists to concede that point; however, it seems to be a false comparison. The threat of a targeted attack against a single village or tribe, directly communicated by a representative of the government, and then backed up by the certainty that the British had both the capability and the credibility to destroy said village, made the air control threats personal. That is not the same as 'strategic bombing' of area targets in an industrialised society. It is human nature to be more concerned about personal threats than with general threats to an organisation or state. The personal nature of the threats

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<sup>25</sup> TNA AIR 10/1105, *Air Publication 1105, Nov 1924, Iraq Command—Report, Oct 1922 – Apr 1924*, (Nov 1924), p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 116.

delivered to the village by an SSO or political officer, or via leaflet, was often sufficient to induce the desired behaviour from a recalcitrant or misbehaving tribe.<sup>27</sup>

The RAF and the political officers realised that together they could operate in the moral domain, that is, using the threat of aerial action to influence behaviour. Salmond described how air control achieved results, ‘not by inflicting casualties but mainly by its effect on morale, by damage to material and by its power to inflict very serious inconvenience for an indefinite period’ on the tribesmen.<sup>28</sup> The initial air control experiment in Iraq established the template for the scheme’s application over the next decade and a half in other frontier regions of the empire. The air control method evolved into a triad of expected behaviours, threatened consequences if expectations were not met, and promised rewards or punishment.

British political and military authorities in Iraq fully understood the characteristics of their adversaries. In 1928, Wing Commander Richard Peck, a staff officer at the Air Ministry (alongside then Wing Commander John Slessor) and a veteran of the air control experiment in Iraq, gave an intentionally provocative lecture at RUSI, ‘Aircraft in Small Wars’.<sup>29</sup> Where Borton had taken a ‘what is possible’ perspective during his 1920 RUSI lecture of a similar title, Peck noted that the after eight years of air policing the role for aeroplanes in small wars was still a ‘subject of prolonged controversy’.<sup>30</sup> Like Borton, Peck’s remarks reflected Callwell’s chapters on guerrilla and hill warfare. To set the stage for his lecture Peck outlined the nature of the irregular adversary,

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<sup>27</sup> J.B. Glubb reinforces this point when discussing the importance of leaflets and then providing a British official to negotiate with the local leaders in order to achieve the desired outcomes, ‘Air and Ground Forces in Punitive Expeditions’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 71, no. 483, (Feb 1926), pp. 779 and 781. Portal makes a similar claim, pointing out the relationship between ultimatum and coercive action, all of which tended to be focused, resolute, and credible, ‘Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire’, 17 Feb 1937, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 82, no. 526, (May 1937), pp. 351 – 354.

<sup>28</sup> TNA AIR 10/1105, *Air Publication 1105*, p. 42. This ‘intent to inconvenience’ was also used on the NWF. Charles Chenevix Trench, *Viceroy’s Agent*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), pp. 41 – 42.

<sup>29</sup> R.H. Peck, ‘Aircraft in Small Wars’, 1 Feb 1928, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 73, no. 491, (Aug 1928), p. 536. In defining ‘small wars’ Peck noted that he meant ‘all wars fought against wild men, or are fought in wild places’, but also included irregulars led by Europeans, i.e., Britain’s East African campaign against African irregulars led by General Paul Von Lettow-Vorbeck and German officers from 1914 – 18.

<sup>30</sup> R.H. Peck, ‘Aircraft in Small Wars’, p. 535.

A very mobile, loosely organised tribal enemy, is able to fight guerrilla warfare without lines of communication, to concentrate and disperse rapidly, to escape being brought to battle except at his own chosen moment. They are magnificent shots, possessing little wealth that cannot be moved or secreted. They are fighting in a country they have known since childhood yet imperfectly known to us...a country in which hillmen are accustomed to move, and know every path which will take them quickly from place to place, but which is inaccessible to the heavier arms and even the field pieces and to the fighting vehicles and supply train which a civilized army requires. Supply entirely by pack transport is often necessary.<sup>31</sup>

Peck reminded the audience that the challenge of fighting and controlling determined guerrillas was not new. Three centuries before the Christian era, Alexander's armies, organised, trained, and equipped to fight contemporary, conventional armies, were confounded by Arab, Persian, and Afghan guerrillas. Later, the Romans, the French Grand Armée, and other conventional armies were frustrated by guerrillas unwilling to submit to the demands of the invaders and refusing to fight in the conventional style of the day. The Romans, the French, and others developed extremely harsh tactics, but relatively effective means for dealing with their guerrilla problems.<sup>32</sup> Mass slaughters, enslavement, and expulsion may have achieved acceptable levels of stability in troublesome regions during ancient eras, but from the late 18th century onward such tactics were usually reproofed whenever discovered and publicised. Still, conventional armies continued to seek ways to overcome the guerrillas' advantages in mobility, intelligence, and influence. What Peck offered that was new, and his contribution to the professional debate, was how best to apply the new technology, air power, in an irregular warfare context.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> R.H. Peck, 'Aircraft in Small Wars', p. 536. A very similar description is given in C.D. 22, No 805, *Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*, (London: Air Ministry, July 1922), Chapter XI, 'Aircraft in Warfare against an Uncivilised Enemy', *Operations Manual, Royal Air Force (Provisional)*, (July 1922), p. 127.

<sup>32</sup> The British were not without culpability in the area of harsh tactics to deal with guerrillas. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, punitive expeditions to restore order and punish recalcitrant tribes, called 'burn and scuttle' operations, killed scores of tribesmen, destroyed villages, killed the livestock, and destroyed man-made water sources. Brandon Marsh, *Ramparts of Empire: British Imperialism and India's Afghan Frontier, 1918 – 1948*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 195.

<sup>33</sup> R.H. Peck, 'Aircraft in Small Wars'.

During the inter-war years, the British were unwilling to take as harsh a stance as had been acceptable practice in previous eras. Also, the British were committed to the League of Nations' instructions to help those territories that were able achieve future independence and a position among the community of nations.<sup>34</sup> So, as the British assumed responsibility for their assigned Mandates in the Middle East and elsewhere, air power promised an appropriate and cost effective tool to counter guerrillas, establish stable and secure environments, and give local civilian governments time to assert themselves as legitimate governing bodies, all at less cost to the Exchequer and with fewer casualties than using imperial troops to police and control the local populations. British air power policy and doctrine of the time reflected the attitude that using aircraft to maintain control of the 'semi-civilised' regions would be both humane and less costly than conventional colonial control methods. In Iraq, Transjordan, and Aden, but also in North-West Frontier of India, targets for air attack were chosen to affect the morale of an adversary and varied 'according to the habits of life and standard of civilisation of the hostile community'.<sup>35</sup> The 1929 addendum to the *RAF War Manual* noted that,

Air action if given full rein can indeed be very severe in its effects, but as it is practised in the countries under air control the casualties and material damage inflicted are negligible. The aim of air action is the moral attack upon the nerves, the habits, and the means of livelihood of the peoples against whom it is necessary to take action, and its moral effect is obviously enhanced in the case of semi-civilised people by the fact that it is a weapon against which they cannot effectively retaliate. It follows that the air weapon is both economical and humane, since it inflicts neither great nor permanent

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<sup>34</sup> D.H. Miller, 'The Origin of the Mandate System'; and *Treaty of Versailles June 28, 1919: Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22*. The former German and Ottoman territories were divided into three categories: A-mandates—advanced nations that had reached a state of development where their existence as independent nations could be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance until they were able to stand alone, B-mandates—Mandatory power would be responsible for the administration in order to prevent slave trade, arms trafficking, and establishment of military and naval bases or training of natives for other than internal policing duties, and C-mandates—those territories so remote or sparsely populated that the region would be administered according to the Mandatory State's [Britain, France, etc.] laws in order to protect the interests of the indigenous peoples.

<sup>35</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 19, *The Psychological Effects of Air Bombardment on Semi-civilised Peoples*, (7 Feb 1924), p. 2.

suffering upon the people against whom it is used nor heavy casualties among those who have to wield it.<sup>36</sup>

The *War Manual*, captured what Glubb and the other SSOs had learned and applied, that in order to be economical and humane, air power depended upon correctly identifying the targets that would achieve the desired influencing effects—the ‘whole success’ of which ‘may depend on the availability of an individual who combines thorough knowledge of the tribes and country, with a certain amount of experience as an air observer’—the SSO.<sup>37</sup>

Peck’s presentation to RUSI went on to suggest that aircraft could be the decisive element in these small wars. Air power, he offered as his premise, was the tool best suited to break the resistance of the guerrillas. No weapon, he asserted, ‘... has given us anything like so great an advantage, and none is so admirably suited to warfare against wild men and in wild countries, as the aircraft—*provided, of course, it is correctly employed*’.<sup>38</sup> [emphasis in the original] He also reiterated the common theme espoused by air control advocates, that the British goal was to exert the minimum force necessary to elicit the desired behaviour from the tribes and to restore stability to an area.<sup>39</sup> It was the responsibility of the civilian political officers or the RAF SSOs to fully explain the government’s expectations, ensure tribal leaders understood the consequences of not meeting expectations, and then administer appropriate rewards or punishment.<sup>40</sup>

In Iraq, the political officers or SSOs would meet with tribal or village leaders to lay out the government’s demands for order and stability. Those demands might be orders to cease

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<sup>36</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, *Some Points on the Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, (1 Jan 1929), p. 1. This memo was published as a supplement to Chapter XIV of the *RAF War Manual*.

<sup>37</sup> Glubb, ‘Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions’, pp. 780 – 781. The need to understand the situation in order to know ‘where and what to attack and how to deal with it’ is an important element of TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control, A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College*, p. 6,

<sup>38</sup> R.H. Peck, ‘Aircraft in Small Wars’, p. 537.

<sup>39</sup> As early as 1923, the British High Commissioner, Sir Percy Cox’s report on the results of air control methods praised the air power’s ability to limit the scope and costs of imperial control. TNA AIR 9/12, *Extract from Report on Iraq Administration by the High Commissioner, April 1922 – March 1923*, pp. 4 and 8.

<sup>40</sup> TNA CAB 24/195, CP 160 (28), *The use of Air Power as Illustrated by the Recent Operations in Arabia*, (17 May 1928), p. 3.

raiding other tribes, move their herds away from another tribe's claimed pastoral areas, pay current or owed taxes, return stolen property, or any number of actions the colonial government deemed necessary from the tribes in order to maintain or restore stability. Should the tribes fail to comply, then the political officer or SSO had the ability to threaten and deliver air strikes, an obviously negative, but not uncommon incentive given the relatively primitive state of air power at the time. But not all applications were kinetic. Aeroplanes made it possible for the RAF SSOs or political officers to spend time with tribes and villages in the more desolate reaches of the empire.<sup>41</sup> For example, SSO reports contain details of reconnaissance flights in south-western Iraq, meetings with tribal leaders, remaining for days among the tribes, and where necessary, delivering warnings of impending attacks should the sheikhs fail to comply with the requirements laid out by civil authorities.<sup>42</sup> This enhanced access to the tribes allowed SSOs to build rapport with tribal leaders, understand the tribes' perspectives on issues, and develop their situational awareness.<sup>43</sup> The SSOs would act as mediators on occasion between the government and the tribes or between disputing tribes because of the relationships they had cultivated and their empathy with the locals' perspectives. Here again, the telegrams and operations summaries found in the SSO reports describe efforts to mediate on the tribes' behalf with political officers and government officials, attempting to gain more time to pay back taxes.<sup>44</sup>

Aircraft were also used on occasion as air ambulances, a capability that did not yet exist in civil aviation. SSOs and political officers could offer the benefits of medical and surgical

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<sup>41</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, C.D. 72, ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, 24 Mar 1930, pp. 14 – 15; TNA AIR 5/171, C.D. 79, ASM 47, *Air Power and Imperial Defence*, 8 May 1930, pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>42</sup> TNA AIR 23/269, *SSO Reports*, provides Flt Lt G.M. Moore's records of his meetings with sheikhs and refugee leaders in Iraq's southern border region, May – June 1925. TNA AIR 23/23, *SSO Reports*, Series of telegrams, 16 Aug 1925 – 31 Jan 1926.

<sup>43</sup> IWM 4410, *Oral History Interview*, Lt Gen Sir John Glubb, reel 1, (26 Mar 1979); IWM 4465, *Oral History Interview*, Maj Gen H.P.W. Hutson, reel 1, (1979).

<sup>44</sup> TNA AIR 23/23, *SSO Reports*, 10 – 12 Feb 1926; TNA AIR 23/27, *SSO Reports*, 1926; TNA 23/408, *Transjordan Intelligence*, Oct 1927; TNA AIR 23/269, *SSO Report*, 3 Mar 1925.

aid to tribesmen in areas beyond the reach of doctors and ‘the conveyance of patients from such districts to the local centres of civilisation, where all facilities for proper treatment exist’.<sup>45</sup> When a cholera epidemic struck Iraq in 1923, live cultures were transported by air to Baghdad from Egypt in order that the medical authorities could produce vaccines in bulk. The RAF then carried medical officers and vaccine to the villages and camps in order to stem the outbreak.<sup>46</sup> Another, rather unusual, non-kinetic application of air power happened in April 1928 when an SSO in Transjordan arranged for transport aircraft to deliver airmen armed with flame-throwers to help combat swarms of locusts destroying valuable pasturelands.<sup>47</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, RAF aircraft were used to patrol for locust migration and swarming, helping civil authorities address this significant threat to the economies of the region.<sup>48</sup>

By 1930, RAF doctrine clearly recognised the value of local medical services to maintaining peace, order, and goodwill, ‘it must always be remembered that the people against whom we are taking action, we have subsequently to govern...it should be the practice once our terms have been accepted, to render medical assistance, wherever such action is necessary and possible’.<sup>49</sup> In a 1933 lecture, Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt, at the time the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, reported, ‘One of the most pacifying influences in a wild and tribal territory is to set up as soon as possible dispensaries where the tribesmen can go for treatment ....’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> TNA AIR 23/269, *SSO Report*, 30 June 1925; also TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum No. 21, *The civilising influence of Medical Service advanced by aid from the Air*, (n.d., circa 1924), p. 1. ASM 21 provides a summary of medical services provided by air throughout Iraq in 1923 and early 1924.

<sup>46</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 21, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> TNA AIR 23/409, *Transjordan Intelligence*, Apr 1928.

<sup>48</sup> TNA AIR 5/171, ASM 47, *Air Power and Imperial Defence*, p. 7; A. van Huis, ‘Can we prevent desert locust plagues?’, *New Strategies in Locust Control*, S. Krall, R. Peveling, and D. Ba Diallo (eds), (Basel, CHE: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1997), pp. 453 – 54.

<sup>49</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, *Notes on the Control of Undeveloped Countries*, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control, A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College*, p. 15.

In order to control and moderate the destructive power of air strikes the colonial authorities put a deliberate approval process in place that ran simultaneously through the British and Iraqi civilian chains, from the British political officer or SSO on the ground ‘in concert with the local Iraqi Administration, and after that request has been considered and approved in succession by the Minister of the Interior in the Iraq government and his British advisor and by the High Commissioner’.<sup>51</sup> While the inherent delays such a process induced could be, and often were frustrating to the SSO at the scene, it was a necessary level of control as this was peacetime policing and not a state of war.<sup>52</sup> The Air Officer Commanding retained the final authority to release the air attacks, based upon the military necessity and propriety.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the inter-war period, political and military proponents of air control agreed that the threat of force was the foundation of the air control scheme,<sup>54</sup> just as the threat of a punitive expedition by the Army had traditionally been used to keep the peace in the ‘semi-civilised’ regions of the empire. And, in order for the threat of an air strike to be credible, it required occasional demonstrations of the power of that force. The RAF’s manual, *Employment of Aircraft on the North-West Frontier of India*, advised airmen that,

Demonstrations in force without offensive action should accompany such warnings [of impending punitive operations] and, if the efficacy of air attack has already been demonstrated or is even known by repute to the tribe concerned, may at times be sufficient to induce satisfactory submission.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> TNA AIR 8/34, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, (1 Aug 1924), p. 3. Also in *Air Publication 1105, Iraq Command Report*, pp. 39 – 40.

<sup>52</sup> TNA AIR 23/28, *Operations Report by 84 (Bombing) Sqn*, 12 Oct 1926. The report begins with the SSO and a flight of DH-9A aircraft finding Akhwan (Saudi) raiders and 1,000 stolen camels. It took seven hours to receive permission to begin air action.

<sup>53</sup> Peter W. Gray, ‘The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policy’, *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Summer 2001), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> TNA AIR 5/262, *Memorandum on the working of air control in Iraq*, (undated, circa 1927), pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>55</sup> TNA AIR 5/1328, *Employment of Aircraft on the North-West Frontier of India*, (1 Mar 1924), p. 4.



*Small Wars* provided instructions for using military power ‘when there is no king to conquer, no capital to seize, no organized army to overthrow, and when there are no celebrated strongholds to capture’. Quoting Lord Wolseley, ‘In planning a war against an uncivilized nation, ... your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion’.<sup>56</sup> When *Small Wars* was written at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the typical irregular adversary was agrarian. Thus, the book advocated taking or scattering livestock and destroying crops and stored supplies in order to ‘quell insurrections’.<sup>57</sup> Callwell’s point was simple, and enduring—in irregular conflict, ‘where the enemy cannot be touched in his patriotism or his honour’, target what the adversary most values in order to influence his behaviour.<sup>58</sup> One can see Callwell’s influence in the RAF doctrine where it dealt with operations against irregulars.<sup>59</sup>

Lawrence’s observations about guerrilla warfare were made from the perspective of the guerrillas, rather than a conventional force charged with countering guerrillas. In guerrilla warfare, wrote Lawrence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the adversary was contained ‘by the silent threat’ of an attack that was not disclosed until the last moment and which was focused on the enemy’s most accessible material rather than his war-fighting strengths or weaknesses.<sup>60</sup> Lawrence suggested that the principles of guerrilla warfare applied equally to air warfare.

What the Arabs did yesterday the Air Forces may do to-morrow. And in the same way—yet more swiftly’; air power’s range, speed, and striking power made it possible to

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<sup>56</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 40 – 41.

<sup>58</sup> Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, p. 129; TNA AIR 5/1328, *Employment of Aircraft on the NWF of India*, p. 6; TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, *Some Points on the Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, p. 1; TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, C.D. 72, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, p. 7; and TNA AIR 10/1911, *AP 1300 Royal Air Force War Manual, Part 1—Operations*, (July 1928), Chap XIV, paras. 19 – 23.

<sup>60</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, (New York: Doubleday, 1926), p. 194.

sustain a 'silent threat' to the tribes and strike their most accessible materials (villages, crops, flocks) rather than their war-fighting strengths.<sup>61</sup>

Lawrence's influence with Churchill and his status as an iconic figure in both Britain and the Middle East gave his ideas extraordinary weight. During one of his less discouraged, but also less modest moods, Lawrence claimed,

I take to myself credit for some of Mr Churchill's pacification of the Middle East for while he was carrying it out he had the help of such knowledge and energy as I possess. His was the imagination and the courage to take a fresh departure and enough skilled knowledge of the political procedure to put his political revolution it into operation.<sup>62</sup>

One can see the influences of both Callwell and Lawrence as the RAF turned theory into practice on the 'wilder' frontiers of the empire.

Through the air control scheme, the British intentionally used air power to frustrate the tribesmen's ethnic and cultural needs to fight man-to-man, while also using air strikes to attack the morale and livelihood of nomadic Bedouins.<sup>63</sup> This was achieved through a method Slessor, in *Central Blue* described as the 'inverted blockade'.<sup>64</sup> Once civil authorities decided to take punitive action against a village or encampment, the goal was to secure a decision as quickly as possible without undue human casualties on either side. SSOs or political officers would inform the residents of the government's demands and consequences of non-compliance. The villagers were given notice to remove their families and valuables, usually 24 – 48 hours prior to the attacks. Once the people were out of the way, aeroplanes would then scatter the flocks, destroy houses, and generally disrupt the normal livelihood of the villagers, keeping them out of their homes and unable to tend to fields and flocks,

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Lawrence of Arabia*, (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1934), p. 381.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Graves, *T.E. Lawrence to his Biographers Robert Graves and Liddell Hart*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), p. 112.

<sup>63</sup> J.B. Glubb, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 71, no. 483, (Feb 1926), p. 782; C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, Chap XI.

<sup>64</sup> Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections*, (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 62.

inconveniencing their lives until the discomfort was unbearable.<sup>65</sup> Chamier provided a graphic description of the discomfort intended by the inverted blockade during a presentation to the Royal Central Asian Society,

Day after day (and frequently at night) they [the air squadrons] keep an unceasing vigil. Soon the tribesmen get restless. Their normal life is dislocated, they cannot carry out cattle herding and the cattle often stray, cooking is a matter of difficulty, crops cannot be attended to, and a plethora of camel ticks, bugs, rats, and fleas in the sheltering caves make life insufferable.<sup>66</sup>

At that point, with a sense of hopelessness instilled among the villagers, the tribal leaders would come to terms.<sup>67</sup> Once the tribal leadership acquiesced to government demands, air power could then be used to bring in the civil administrators, political officers, doctors, and veterinarians to offer beneficial government presence and services.<sup>68</sup> The inverted blockade was a leadership-centric model that used the families' dissatisfaction as an indirect means of influencing the will of local decision-makers.

The inverted blockade made life intolerable for the entire tribe by disrupting traditional routines, damaging homes, and unsettling means of livelihood.<sup>69</sup> Contemporary attitudes of the period towards the Bedouin, both among the Iraqi elites and the British, characterised them as 'truculent and treacherous', semi-civilised, uncivilised, or savages, rationalised, even

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<sup>65</sup> TNA AIR 5/168, C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, (Mar 1920), June 1921, p. 5; and TNA AIR 10/1105, *Air Publication 1105*, Nov 1924, *Iraq Command—Report, Oct 1922 – Apr 1924*, (Nov 1924), p. 42.

<sup>66</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'Air control of frontiers', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 21, no. 3, (1934), p. 407.

<sup>67</sup> Chamier, 'Air control of frontiers', p. 407; Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 52. See also, J. B. Glubb, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions', *Journal of the United Service Institution*, vol. 71, no. 483, (Feb 1926), pp. 781 – 782; H. Le M. Brock, 'Air Operations on the N.W.F., 1930', *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, (1932), p. 28; TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 52, *Air Control, A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College*, (Apr 1933), p. 14; and LHA 15/3/134, *A Lecture on Air Control given by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff [AM Sir E.R. Ludlow-Hewitt] to the Officers of the Northern Command*, (Dec 1934), pp. 15 – 18.

<sup>68</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control*, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 52; Glubb, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions', pp. 781-782; and TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control, A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College*, p. 14.

if it did not justify, the tactics and weapons used to make the tribes bend to the will of the government.<sup>70</sup>

### **Air Control on the North-West Frontier of India**

T.R. Moreman called the area between the administered areas of 'British India' and the border with Afghanistan the 'most strategically sensitive border of the British Empire'.<sup>71</sup> Between 1849 – 1947 British and Indian troops endured near constant guerrilla conflict with the native Pathan tribes in order to maintain imperial rule. After the First World War, tribal control was based on containing the tribes through a combination of 'bribery and blackmail'. Political officers administered the region and kept the peace through personal influence with the tribal leaders re-enforced by economic and military coercive means.<sup>72</sup> The British Resident in Waziristan, Lt Col Charles Bruce, argued that control of tribes was achieved through political officers' 'time honoured methods ... intimate knowledge of them, and to their appreciation of his character, justice, honesty, and purpose'.<sup>73</sup> The use of aeroplanes offered potential new means of tribal control, however the Indian General Staff kept the RAF in a subordinate role and placed 'elaborate restrictions on the employment of airpower for a mixture of military, political, and ethical reasons'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, 'Note on the nature of tribal warfare in Mesopotamia', War Office, 4 Mar 1920, p. 2. It should be noted that this attitude towards the local populations was not exclusive to Iraq. Similar characterisations existed towards indigenous peoples in other regions, e.g., 'The tribesmen are admittedly a barbarous and vindictive enemy...', TNA AIR 23/5432, *Employment of Aircraft on the North-West Frontier of India*, (1 Mar 1924), p. 3; C.A.L. Howard, 'Operations in British Somaliland, 1920', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 53, no. 231, (Apr 1923); and Rt Hon Sir Philip Sassoon, 'Air power in the Middle East', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 20, no. 3, (1933), p. 397, the people of the Sudan are 'a spindle-legged, primitive people clad chiefly in a long spear or a big club'.

<sup>71</sup> T.R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849 – 1947*, (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1998), p. xxi.

<sup>72</sup> T.R. Moreman, "'Watch and ward': the Army in India and the North-West Frontier, 1920 – 1939", in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, C. 1700 – 1947*, David Kilingray and David Omissi, eds., (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 142.

<sup>73</sup> Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877 – 1947*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011, p. 152.

<sup>74</sup> Moreman, 'Watch and ward', p. 145.

In 1922, the Prime Minister sent Sir John Salmond, accompanied by then Wing Commander Chamier, on an inspection tour to India to investigate state of decay of RAF there.<sup>75</sup> In addition to examining the status of aircraft serviceability and crew training, Salmond was asked to consider if it were possible to achieve ‘economies by the increased use of the Air Force, in co-operating with the Army, for controlling territory’.<sup>76</sup> The inspiration for investigating the possibility of air substitution on the North-West Frontier (NWF) may have come from Sir John Maffey, the Chief Commissioner for the NWF, in his 1922 proposal to withdraw the army from the unadministered tribal areas in order to reduce provocation and temptation.<sup>77</sup> Salmond’s final report to the Viceroy in India noted that in the course of his discussions with military and political officers concerning mission of the RAF in India, he concluded that air power offered a means of overcoming the inherent challenges of tribal control on the NWF, namely the danger faced by British and imperial forces during punitive expeditions into the unadministered areas from ambush and guerrilla attacks, the distances between settlements and British frontier outposts, and the difficulty of mountainous and inhospitable terrain with rudimentary lines of communication.<sup>78</sup> In Salmond’s opinion, another test of the air control scheme then on-going in Iraq was warranted.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond on the Royal Air Force in India*, (Aug 1922), p. 4, also AIR 8/46. The reply by the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Rawlinson, is found at TNA AIR 8/46, *Memorandum on AVM Sir John Salmond’s Report*, (Aug 1922); B.H. Liddell Hart summarised and cited these documents in May 1930, in a series of three articles published in the *Daily Telegraph*, TNA AIR 9/62, *Air Control in Practice*, a series of three articles by B.H. Liddell Hart in the *Daily Telegraph*, (23 – 25 May 1930); TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means in War and Peace and What it has Achieved*, (30 June 1930), pp. 19 – 20, also CAB 16/87; Slessor discusses the deplorable state of the RAF in India from his perspective as a young pilot serving with 20 Sqn from 1921 – 22, *Central Blue*, pp. 33 – 38.

<sup>76</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, pp. 35 – 36.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: the Third Afghan War and the Campaign in Waziristan, 1919 – 20*, (London: Spellmount, Ltd., 2004), p. 243.

<sup>78</sup> H. Le M. Brock, ‘Air Operations on the N.W.F., 1930’, *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, (1932), p. 24.

<sup>79</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond*, p. 7. Maffey travelled with Salmond during the inspection tour and it is not hard to infer that Salmond’s contention that Maffey sympathised with and was prepared to try the air substitution proposal, was the result of discussions the two had while touring the region.

In support of his recommendation Salmond cited willingness by the commanding generals of the Northern and Western commands and ‘considerable support from the Frontier Political Officers’ to try substitution of air forces for ground troops.<sup>80</sup> The Commander-in-Chief, Lord Rawlinson, who in 1919 had extolled the value of aircraft used in support of ground troops, was unconvinced of an independent role for the Air Force. He wrote, ‘I am unable wholly to accept the optimistic predictions’, based upon his experiences during the First World War, in northern Russia, and the frontier of India.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Rawlinson was unwilling to reduce the size of the Army on the Indian frontier, even for an experiment, until more evidence was available from the RAF’s air control operations in Iraq.<sup>82</sup> In the spring of 1925, the RAF got its chance.

The Mahsud tribe in Waziristan had been a regular source of trouble for Government of India. The remoteness of the tribe’s villages along the border with Afghanistan, the inhospitable terrain, and the warlike nature of the Mahsud meant that they were left alone by British and Indian officials for almost two decades between 1901 and 1919.<sup>83</sup> With the outbreak of the Third Afghan War in May 1919, most of the forward militia posts were evacuated from the region, allowing the tribes to raid, steal, and otherwise terrorise their neighbours. In order to address the worsening security situation, the British colonial government conducted a series of punitive expeditions between 1919 and 1923. Peace was

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<sup>80</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond*, pp. 6 – 8. Support for the scheme by tribal control officials should be viewed with a bit of scepticism as two-thirds of the political officers serving on the NWF had been recruited from the Army. (Robert S.G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and ‘The Tribal Question’*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 29) It is reasonable to expect that former soldiers would endorse a proposal that reduce the number of casualties that resulted from traditional punitive expeditions into hostile tribal areas. The Political department in Waziristan was also sceptical about the use of aeroplanes in a punitive role, questioning the efficacy of air power, the moral and political liability of air operations, and the controls on the use of air-delivered effects. Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> TNA AIR 8/46, *Rawlinson Memo*, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> TNA AIR 8/46, *Rawlinson Memo*, p. 3. It is interesting to note that the Air Staff presented Lord Rawlinson’s concerns in a rather positive light, TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means*, p. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew M. Roe, “‘Pink’s War’”, – Applying the Principles of Air Control to Waziristan, 9 March to 1 May 1925’, *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 13, no. 3, (Autumn/Winter 2010), p. 99.

restored with all but the most obstinate and isolated tribes. Despite repeated attempts to negotiate with those tribes, the incidents continued.<sup>84</sup>

In December 1924, the British Resident in Waziristan requested the government allow the use of aircraft to punish the worst offenders. Looking for an opportunity to show that the air control scheme could work on the NWF, the Air Officer Commanding at the time, Air Vice Marshal Sir Edward Ellington, had No. 1 Wing begin to plan for operations.<sup>85</sup> In February, the Resident delivered warnings to the tribes that unless they complied with government terms air actions would be taken. On 9 Mar 1925, bombing and strafing began. Over the following weeks, air actions were taken and then suspended as tribal jirgas met with political officers to negotiate. When negotiations faltered, bombing was resumed. Although there were a number of small successes, officials realized it was going to take some time before full control of the area was established. By the end of March, tactics changed from direct attack to air blockade. And, at the beginning of April, the RAF began using night tactics to disrupt the tribes' ability to gather crops and feed their animals in what had been the safety of darkness.

In mid-April the most hostile of the tribes proposed to negotiate a peaceful ending to the operations. Bombing and surveillance were halted in the Spli Toi region in order for the jirga to assemble. When negotiations again failed, aerial surveillance and bombing resumed, including night raids. Between 17 and 28 April, air operations were started, stopped, and started again as the tribes met with political officers to discuss terms, terms were rejected, and the negotiators adjusted their demands. On 1 May, after 54 days of air operations, terms were agreed to by all parties and peace was restored. The official report from the Secretary

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<sup>84</sup> Roe, 'Pink's War', pp. 99 – 100.

<sup>85</sup> E. Ellington, *The London Gazette*, supplement, 17 Nov 1925, quoted in Roe, 'Pink's War', p. 101.

of State from India estimated there were 11 casualties.<sup>86</sup> By contrast, punitive operations by ground forces in Waziristan over a six-month period in 1919 – 1929 cost 1,800 killed, 3,675 wounded, and 40,000 sick casualties.<sup>87</sup> These initial operations in Waziristan established the RAF as an effective contributor to imperial policing in the NWF region. However, as the army maintained command over military operations in India, the RAF was never again given the opportunity to conduct independent operations, instead playing a key role with the army in *joint* tribal control on the NWF.<sup>88</sup>

Key to successful policing operations was successful integration of intelligence information provided through the district administrators [political officers].<sup>89</sup> Unlike in Iraq, the Government of India insisted on the primacy of the civilian political officers. Because the RAF was not given command of military operations in India, and also because the environment was too dangerous for isolated British officers to live among the tribes in the unadministered areas of the NWF, the RAF did not create a cadre of Special Service Officers and embed them in the villages.<sup>90</sup> Still, ‘direct contact between the air commander and the political authorities handling the tribes and with all intelligence resources’ was essential.<sup>91</sup> Without embedded SSOs or political officers, situational awareness and intelligence regarding the movement and intentions of the tribes was the result of ‘political information,

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<sup>86</sup> Roe, ‘Pink’s War’, p. 108.

<sup>87</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Roe, ‘Pink’s War’, p. 113.

<sup>89</sup> Andrew M. Roe, ‘Friends in High Places: air power on the North-West Frontier of India’, *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, (Summer 2008), pp. 40 – 41.

<sup>90</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond*, p. 6. ‘All camps are enclosed with barbed wire ... no individual is allowed outside except under arms and with escort’; although TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means*, p. 8, suggests that the RAF was willing to consider SSOs for the NWF. T.R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849 – 1947*, (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1998), p. 5, ‘British officials were expressly forbidden to go into tribal territory to minimise incidents’.

<sup>91</sup> Brock, ‘Air operations on the NWF, 1930’, p. 25; this is almost verbatim from TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means*, p. 8, evidence that the RAF likely scripted its public message regarding the relationship between the Air Force and the political administrators in the colonies.



or news obtained from local friendlies and agents' gathered during the civilian political officers occasional visits.<sup>92</sup>

The political officers on the NWF, many of whom were former soldiers, likely understood the basics of air support and also the need for accuracy when it came to air actions.<sup>93</sup> Charles Trench's account of a political agent's life in India after the First World War, offers the story of Arthur (later Sir Arthur) 'Bunch' Parsons, the political agent in South Waziristan who 'guided, navigated, and identified targets for the bombers' in order to ensure the bombs 'spared the just and only fell on the unjust'. Trench notes that Parsons was the exception and that most political officers were content to serve as observers.<sup>94</sup> By 1930, because of better maps indexed to aerial photography, 'local Political Officers are able to identify each village and hamlet ... in what was formerly *terra incognita*'.<sup>95</sup> In answering questions to the CID's Defence of India Sub-Committee on the possible roles for air power on the NWF, the Air Staff was certain to highlight such comments as 'by means of the aeroplane a Political Officer can obtain a far more intimate knowledge of his charge than was possible in the past' and '...it has done an enormous amount towards increasing that [intimate] knowledge [of the local political officer]', and 'nowhere on the Frontier has so much use of aeroplanes been made (for political purposes) as in Waziristan', in addition to the usual RAF messages about air power's economy, ability to overcome the obstacles

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<sup>92</sup> H.L. Davies, 'Military Intelligence in Tribal Warfare on the North-West Frontier of India', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 63, no. 272, (July 1933), pp. 290 – 91.

<sup>93</sup> A quick scan of the *Reports on the Administration of Iraq* produced by the Colonial Office (CO 730 series) for the years 1920 – 1932 shows that many political officers assigned to the region retained the appellation of their wartime ranks.

<sup>94</sup> Trench, *Viceroy's Agent*, p. 41.

<sup>95</sup> TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means*, p. 39; and 29 July 1923 *Note by Resident Waziristan*, quoted in Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, p. 151.

preventing effective political control in the inaccessible regions of the NWF, and lack of casualties to either side during air operations.<sup>96</sup>

During the inter-war period, although air control methods were employed for tribal control in the unadministered areas of the NWF, there was only one instance where fully independent operations by the RAF were permitted. Still, air policing on the NWF was not unsuccessful. As Salmond noted in his report, 'some countries are more favourable to obtaining rapid results from the air than others', echoing Lawrence's caution that air control methods were not universally applicable.<sup>97</sup> The political officers' lack of access to the tribal areas due to the long distances in a region as large as Waziristan, the difficult and forbidding terrain, and danger from hostile tribes, plus the government's desire to employ civilian political officers over military intelligence officers, made the environment on the NWF different from those found in Iraq, Transjordan, and Aden. Yet the effects achieved were similar. Air power was the ready coercive force that backed up the civilian political officers' dealings with the tribes, while also enabling the political officers' access and understanding of dangerous and difficult areas.<sup>98</sup> The lesson to be taken from air policing on the NWF of India is that whether in support of civilian political officers or RAF SSOs, it was the political officer backed up by credible and capable air power that enabled successful air control in the 'wilder' reaches of the empire.

### **The Peculiar Case of Palestine**

It is instructive at this point to examine how the air control scheme was applied to the situation in Palestine between the wars, as this was a case where air power was less than

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<sup>96</sup> TNA AIR 75/27, *What Air Control Means*, pp. 9 – 10, and 39; and 26 July 1923 Memorandum from Chief Commissioner, quoted in Tripodi, *Edge of Empire*, p. 151.

<sup>97</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond*, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> CHAR 17/29, *Report by AVM Sir John Salmond*, pp. 3 – 4.

successful at achieving Britain's desired ends.<sup>99</sup> To understand Palestine, it helps to begin in 1917. After three years of war, the Allies were weary. Russia and Romania had been defeated, Britain and France were nearing exhaustion, Italy was severely demoralised after its defeat at Caporetto, and US forces had not yet arrived in sufficient numbers to make a difference.<sup>100</sup> In order to gain support from the world Jewish community, counter Jewish pacifism, encourage Jews in Germany to agitate for peace, and influence the Americans to act faster, in November 1917 the British Foreign Secretary, A.J. Balfour, sent a letter to Baron Rothschild, a leader within the British Jewish community, expressing Britain's support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.<sup>101</sup> In a short statement that would become known as the Balfour Declaration, the Foreign Secretary outlined the three principles that would guide Britain's future engagement in Palestine.

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.<sup>102</sup>

During its international dealings after the war, the British Cabinet stood behind the Balfour Declaration. 'The honour of the Government was involved in the Declaration made by Mr Balfour, and to go back on our pledge would seriously reduce the prestige of this country in the eyes of Jews throughout the world'.<sup>103</sup> The commitment to uphold Balfour's 'promise', forced the Cabinet to walk a difficult line trying to balance the expectations of both Jews and Arabs in the region.

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<sup>99</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, *AP 1300 Royal Air Force War Manual, Part I—Operations*, (July 1928), Chap XIV and LII, details the conditions under which air operations would be inappropriate, such as in 'particularly close country...and when friendly and hostile tribes are intermixed'.

<sup>100</sup> TNA CAB 24/270/8, CP 163(37), *Palestine Commission Report*, (22 June 1937), chap. 2, p. 23.

<sup>101</sup> TNA CAB 24/158/61, CP 60(23), *Palestine and the Balfour Declaration*, (Jan 1923), p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Mr Balfour to Lord Rothschild, 2 Nov 1917, 'Palestine for the Jews', *The Times*, (9 Nov 1917), p. 7; repeated in TNA CAB 24/270/8, *Palestine Commission Report*, (22 June 1937), p. 22.

<sup>103</sup> TNA CAB 23/26, CAB 70(21), *Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet*, (18 Aug 1921), pp. 8.

Peace was impossible on the lines of the Balfour Declaration, which involved setting up a National Home for the Jews and respecting the rights of the Arab population. The result of this inconsistency must be to estrange both Arabs and Jews, while involving us in futile military expenditure.<sup>104</sup>

In 1921, the cost of the British garrison in Palestine was approximately £3.5 million per year.<sup>105</sup> In keeping with the fiscal austerity measures that were shaping much of post-war British policy, the Cabinet proposed to re-deploy ten Indian battalions from Palestine and replace them with aeroplanes, armoured cars, and a strong local levy, hoping to find dramatic savings on the scale achieved in Iraq.<sup>106</sup> If it had succeeded in Palestine, the air substitution scheme would have had the added benefit of reducing the cost of India's contribution to imperial defence, another political factor influencing the Cabinet during the inter-war period.<sup>107</sup>

Churchill, as the Colonial Secretary, had requested the Cabinet assign Palestine to the Colonial Office, as the Cabinet had recently done with Iraq and Transjordan. His rationale for the assignment was first that Palestine and Transjordan were naturally linked together by proximity and history, but also to achieve similar cost efficiencies by reducing forces as had

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<sup>104</sup> TNA CAB 23/26, CAB 70(21), *Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet*, pp. 8 – 9. Related and supporting documentation is also found in TNA CAB 24/125, CP 3040, *Note on Palestine and Mesopotamia Mandates*, Middle East Department, Colonial Office, (8 June 1921), p. 3. See TNA CAB 24/270/8, CP 163(37), *Palestine Commission Report*, Chapters II – IV, for an extensive review of Britain's efforts to manage the expectations of both Arabs and Jews in the region between the wars.

<sup>105</sup> TNA AIR 8/47, CP 3515, *Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, 'Palestine', (Nov 1921), p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> As early as May 1921, Churchill was reporting 'rapid progress with the reduction of the garrison [in Palestine]', TNA CAB 23/25, CAB 45 (21), *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet*, (31 May 1921), p. 2; air substitution is covered in TNA AIR 9/19, *Air Staff Memorandum on The Situation in Trans-Jordania*, (30 Apr 1924), p. 2; TNA AIR 8/47, CP 3515, 'Palestine', p. 1; TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, (2 Sep 1929), p. 5.

<sup>107</sup> TNA CAB 23/23, *Conclusions of a conference of Cabinet ministers*, (1 Dec 1920), p. 1; TNA CAB 24/117, *The Palestine Garrison, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War*, (18 Dec 1920), p. 1; TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3197, *Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, (4 Aug 1921), p. 1 and p. 3; TNA CAB 24/127, CP 3208, *Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India*, (4 Aug 1921), p. 2. 'London unquestioningly assumed that India would continue to play a major role in the supply of both men and material for the [Middle East] region. The Indian government, however, did not share London's happy confidence and soon began moving to reduce their commitments there.' Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918 – 1922*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 52.

been done in the other Mandates.<sup>108</sup> Omissi goes so far as to suggest that in the end, economic factors were the deciding factor.<sup>109</sup> Where the War Office had resisted the transfer of Iraq to the Air Ministry, in 1922 it did not consider Palestine strategically significant and did not resist Churchill's efforts to place an air officer in command in Palestine.<sup>110</sup> This attitude towards the strategic significance of Palestine would change in 1935 once Haifa became the western terminus for the oil pipeline from Kurdistan and Italian incursions into Abyssinia threatened access to the Suez Canal.<sup>111</sup> The British also recognised that ensuring peace and security in Palestine would have a wider effect on the Arab populations in other Middle Eastern colonies and Mandates, as well as the Muslim population of India.<sup>112</sup>

The security problems in Palestine were different than those of the other major venues where the air control scheme had been implemented.<sup>113</sup> First, there were the differences in the threats to internal peace and stability, and secondly Palestine had a different tactical environment from the other mandated territories. In Iraq, Transjordan, Kurdistan, and Aden, the issue was largely one of tribal control—forcing semi-nomadic tribes to pay their taxes and stop raiding each other, in a fairly desolate geography.<sup>114</sup> In Palestine however, the problem was to keep an urban civil war between passionate, hopeful Zionists wanting a future Jewish

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<sup>108</sup> TNA CAB 24/98, *Conclusions of a meeting of the Finance Committee*, (9 Feb 1920); TNA AIR 8/47, CP 3515, 'Palestine', p. 1; TNA CAB 24/117, *The Palestine Garrison, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War*, (18 Dec 1920), p. 1; and TNA AIR 8/47, *Note on Colonial Office Proposals to Convert the Gendarmeries in Palestine into Police Forces*, (15 Jan 1925), p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> David Omissi, 'Technology and Repression: Air Control in Palestine, 1922 – 36', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, (Dec 1990), p. 43.

<sup>110</sup> Omissi, *Air Power and colonial control*, p. 44. Interestingly, in 'Technology and Repression', p. 59, Omissi uses the words 'not worth defending' instead of 'not strategically significant', a change of wording that perhaps provides further insight into rationale behind the severe reductions made in the Palestine military garrison?

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919 – 1939*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 487.

<sup>112</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Notes on the Importance of Palestine and Transjordan, and the role that would be Expected of These Countries in the Event of a Major War Involving the Full Resources of the British Empire*, (8 Oct 1926), pp. 1 – 2; and Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 465.

<sup>113</sup> TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 3; TNA AIR 9/19, *Note on the Future Garrison of Palestine (with Special Reference to Air Vice Marshal Dowding's Appreciation of 25<sup>th</sup> September)*, (9 Oct 1929), p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Note on Future Garrison of Palestine*, p. 3; Philip Anthony Towle, *Pilots and Rebels: The use of aircraft in unconventional warfare, 1918 – 1988*, (Oxford, UK: Brassey's Ltd., 1989), p. 45.

state and equally passionate, indigenous Arabs fearful of losing everything to the Jewish immigrants in check.<sup>115</sup> After reviewing the circumstances behind the 1929 Palestine riots, the Air Ministry concluded that ‘the primary cause of disorder has for many years – and especially since the Balfour Declaration – been Arab-Jew hatred’.<sup>116</sup> Passion cannot be regulated by force, thus it hardly mattered whether ground forces or air forces were detailed to control the situation. Brian Bond observed that from the beginning, the British Mandate in Palestine was doomed to fail because it was ‘impossible to reconcile the pledge to create a Jewish national home with the aspirations of Arab nationalism’.<sup>117</sup> The second factor limiting the effectiveness of the air control scheme was the urban nature of Palestine.<sup>118</sup> The Air Ministry investigation of the riots also concluded that the ‘limitations of air power in a country like Palestine are well known, and aircraft can do little to deal with riots in towns once they have broken out’.<sup>119</sup>

It must be emphasised that the limitations of air power in an urban setting were well known, even before air control was attempted in Palestine.<sup>120</sup> Callwell and Lawrence had both focused on guerrilla operations in open environments. From the very beginning, Trenchard rejected the use of aircraft as instruments of government control in ‘civilised’

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<sup>115</sup> CAB 23/25, CAB 45 (21), *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet*, p. 2; TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 1; TNA CAB 24/117, *The Palestine Garrison*, p. 2; IWM 4492, *Oral History Interview, Brig Edward H. Tinker*, (24 Oct 1979), reel 2; R.H.L. Fink, ‘Regional Control and the Co-ordination of Air and Land Forces’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 76, no. 501, (Feb 1931), pp. 20 – 21; and Omissi, ‘Technology and Repression’, pp. 41 and 59.

<sup>116</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Note on Future Garrison of Palestine*, p. 6.

<sup>117</sup> Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>118</sup> Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 142; Omissi, *Air Power and colonial control*, p. 45; and Omissi, ‘Technology and Repression’, p. 52.

<sup>119</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Note on Future Garrison of Palestine*, p. 9; Jafna L. Cox, in ‘A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919 – 32’ *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1985), p. 176; Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, p. 49.

<sup>120</sup> TNA AIR 8/45, *Odd Notes on “Substitution”*, (21 June 1932), dictated as a basis for a talk to the Parliamentary Army and Air Committees by Sir Christopher Llewellyn Bullock, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Air Ministry, p. 22 (copy also found in AIR 9/12); and TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 4.

settings such as India, Egypt, and Ireland.<sup>121</sup> In May 1920, the Air Staff published a policy memorandum that severely restricted the use of aircraft ‘in civilised countries’.<sup>122</sup> In February 1922, Churchill had stated that Palestine was not intended to be controlled from the air.<sup>123</sup> Ten years later, official inquiries following the 1929 Palestine riots seemed to give critics of the RAF a reason to claim that the air control method had failed.<sup>124</sup> This was not necessarily a fair claim, however. During the Palestine riots, the employment of air power had been severely restricted.<sup>125</sup> The British political authorities limited air actions to using only machine guns when looters were caught in the act or when persons were caught committing acts of violence.<sup>126</sup> Trenchard, in one of his last official statements on air control published before the official enquiry into the Palestine riots had been published, reminding the Cabinet of his April 1920 memorandum against the use of aeroplanes in ‘civilised’ regions and saying, ‘The Air Staff have never contended that air action is an instrument well suited to intervene in aid of the civil power in towns’, and then contrasting the use of air power in relatively open and rural Transjordan against that in compact, urban, and racially-charged Palestine.<sup>127</sup>

Against the advice of the military authorities in Palestine, the size of the British garrison was incrementally reduced, relying increasingly on police forces, until by 1929 only a few

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<sup>121</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, *Memorandum by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard on the subject of the use of aircraft in the case of industrial disturbances or risings in what may be called definitely settled countries such as India and Egypt*, (26 Apr 1920), pp. 1 – 2; Boyle, *Trenchard*, pp. 370 – 371; Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 41.

<sup>122</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, *Memorandum on the Use of Aircraft in Connection with Riots*, (May 1920), p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> *Letter from Winston Churchill to Secretary of State for India*, (24 Feb 1922), quoted in TNA AIR 8/47, *Air Staff Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 2; and also in TNA AIR 8/45, *Letter from CAS to Winston Churchill*, (16 June 1930), p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Towle, *Pilots and Rebels*, p. 45.

<sup>125</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Notes on the Use of the Air Arm during the Riots in Palestine*, (21 Nov 1929), p. 1. This Air Staff note makes the point that the RAF was only allowed to strafe a dozen times during the operation and that bombing was never permitted by the High Commissioner.

<sup>126</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Use of the Air Arm during the Riots in Palestine*, p. 1.

<sup>127</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 332 (29), *Note by the Secretary of State for Air*, Nov 1929, circulating *Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff*, Sir Hugh Trenchard, ‘The Fuller Employment of Air Power in Imperial Defence’, (Nov 1929), with accompanying *Supplementary Memorandum Outlining Various Schemes of Air Control*, p. 3.

aeroplanes and armoured cars remained.<sup>128</sup> In 1930, as Sir John Salmond, now Chief of the Air Staff, prepared to answer criticisms on the Air Ministry's handling of the 1929 riots, he wrote to Churchill and reminded him he had been 'the main instrument in transferring the military control of Palestine' for administrative purposes to the Air Force and that Churchill had promised [in the 1922 letter] that transferring control did not mean Palestine was to be policed from the air. Salmond's letter continued, making the point that the Air Ministry had never claimed it could 'control Palestine from the air, as it is and always has been obviously impossible to quell disturbances in large and civilised cities such as Jerusalem, etc., by air bombardment', a point that was entirely consistent with the Air Ministry's position throughout, that the air control scheme was more nuanced than the critics suggested.<sup>129</sup>

In 1920 British administrators had recognised that a strong military garrison would be needed to maintain internal security in Palestine until a competent local security force could be created.<sup>130</sup> Churchill, in a memorandum to the Cabinet, had noted that, 'Riots are likely to break out in large towns such as Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, and Nablus' because the enmity between Arabs and Jews, based upon the impression that Arab lands were to be forcibly taken away by the British and given to the Jews, would cause Jewish settlements to be 'raided whenever religious feeling runs high, or mischief makers succeed in exciting local feelings'.<sup>131</sup> It was in this urban, 'civilised', and politically charged setting that the Air Staff's reluctance to take on responsibility for Palestine must be noted.

By the mid-1920s, tensions among Arabs and Jews in Palestine seemed to have abated and thinking the crisis had passed, the British reduced the military garrison to a single RAF

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<sup>128</sup> TNA CO 733/13, *Letter from War Office to Colonial Office*, (14 Nov 1921), pp. 266 – 67; 'The development and waning of the forces in Palestine, 1922 – 1926', author not given, *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 13, no. 4, (1926), pp. 365 – 66; Fink, 'Regional Control and the Co-ordination of Air and Land Forces', p. 20.

<sup>129</sup> TNA AIR 8/45, *Letter from CAS to Winston Churchill*, p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> TNA CAB 24/117, *The Palestine Garrison*, p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> TNA CAB 24/117, *The Palestine Garrison*, pp. 1 – 2.



squadron and two companies of RAF armoured cars, all based in Transjordan.<sup>132</sup> Although the security situation seemed to be developing for the better, the 'High Commissioner took the view that the internal condition of the country could not be relied upon to remain stable, and insisted upon the need for a military or gendarmerie force'.<sup>133</sup> Struggling to provide adequate security 'for as little money as possible', a gendarmerie was created from locally recruited forces with British officers and soldiers mixed in to 'animate and dominate the local gendarmerie and make it an effective instrument'.<sup>134</sup> But, in 1925, a new High Commissioner abolished the gendarmerie and internal security was entrusted primarily to the police backed up by a tiny contingent of air forces, despite recommendations to the contrary by the Air Staff.<sup>135</sup> Although an attractive outcome at the time for a cost-conscious Cabinet, in 1929 the police forces were unable to control renewed fighting between the Arabs and Jews.

Further evidence of 'Palestine was different' may be found in the assessment of the intelligence requirements. Prior to the 1929 riots, there were no SSOs in Palestine and the lone SSO in Transjordan was there to observe and report on external threats.<sup>136</sup> His instructions were, 'keep in touch with the temper of the tribes, to get early warning of impending raids from beyond the borders or of inter-tribal disorders within them, and to collect information about the fighting value of the tribes, their rifle strength, number of camels, and so on'.<sup>137</sup> This external focus did little to help maintain the internal security of Palestine. Because the Palestine problem was one of 'civil lawlessness and communal

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<sup>132</sup> Clayton, *British Empire as a Superpower*, pp. 138 – 140; TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 5.

<sup>134</sup> TNA CAB 23/26, CAB 70(21), *Cabinet Conclusions*, pp. 8 – 9.

<sup>135</sup> TNA AIR 8/47, *Notes on Public Security in Palestine*, p. 9.

<sup>136</sup> TNA CAB 53/20, COS 212, 'Transcript of notes by Brigadier Dobbie and Air Vice Marshal Dowding given *in camera* [emphasis in original, legal term meaning privately and out of public hearing] before the Commission of Inquiry', *Situation in Palestine*, (12 Dec 1929), Annex 1, p. xvii.

<sup>137</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Notes on the Future Garrison of Palestine*, p. 3.

hatred', the intelligence required was 'civil and political in character; the properly responsible party is the civil authority, and the military commander must rely upon the civil intelligence organisation to collect and interpret the information'.<sup>138</sup> The sharing of intelligence between the police and the military failed to happen and British authorities were caught off guard when the troubles started.

During the inquiry after the 1929 riots, Brigadier Dobbie, commander of the infantry battalions brought in to quell the violence, testified that air forces had proven inappropriate to maintain security in Palestine because they were not allowed to develop their full offensive power, could not discriminate innocents from agitators in a crowd, and could not operate at night.<sup>139</sup> These were admitted limitations that the Air Force had previously identified. Dobbie went on to note that the rioters realised the threat from the air was a bluff because of those limitations.<sup>140</sup> Where Dobbie stated aircraft had made a valuable contribution, though, was as mobility assets.

On 23 August, the level of violence had escalated to the point that the High Commissioner requested additional troops from Egypt. The next afternoon the RAF moved two platoons of the South Wales Borderers from Egypt to Jerusalem via air transport. The rest of the battalion arrived by rail the following day.<sup>141</sup> On 26 August, with two battalions of infantry now in Palestine, Group Captain Playfair, the air officer commanding in Palestine and Transjordan, transferred command of military forces to Brigadier Dobbie because the Army was now providing the preponderance of military force in Palestine. In mid-September, Air Vice Marshal Hugh Dowding arrived and took over command from Dobbie, but by that point the worst of the fighting was over.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Notes on the Future Garrison of Palestine*, pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>139</sup> TNA CAB 53/20, 'Transcript of notes by Brigadier Dobbie and Air Vice Marshal Dowding', Annex 1, p. i.

<sup>140</sup> TNA CAB 53/20, COS 212, *Situation in Palestine*, Annex 1, p. iii.

<sup>141</sup> *The Times*, 'Jerusalem Riots', (26 Aug 1929), p. 12.

<sup>142</sup> Omissi, 'Technology and Repression', p. 48.

Looking at the security challenges in Palestine between 1920 and 1929, one may draw the following conclusions. First, security considerations took a back seat to economic ones. Motivated to cut defence spending, and encouraged by the air control scheme's successes in Iraq and Transjordan, the Colonial Office ignored the expert advice of those who recognised that Palestine was different and who understood the capabilities and limitations of air power. Secondly, contemporary aircraft technology was inappropriate for Palestine's predominantly urban setting. Hobbled by prohibitive ROE, unable to determine enemy from innocent bystander, and incapable of operating at night, the Air Force proved largely ineffectual when the rioting broke out. Thirdly, Palestine's military intelligence structure was optimised for tribal and border control, not internal security. Air power had little influence on either the Jews or the Arabs in Palestine's religious and politically motivated conflict. Dowding recommended during the investigation that the military commander needed a small military intelligence section dedicated to internal security.<sup>143</sup> Among Dowding's changes was the creation of an independent military intelligence structure under the Air Headquarters comprised of two branches, a staff section for administration and analysis, and a field section for collection and liaison with the local police forces and the population.<sup>144</sup> By the beginning of 1931, there were four RAF SSOs collecting intelligence and maintaining situational awareness among the populace and also serving as liaisons between the military and the police.<sup>145</sup> All of the SSOs spoke Arabic and were experienced intelligence officers.<sup>146</sup> Their

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<sup>143</sup> TNA CAB 53/20, COS 212, *Situation in Palestine*, Annex 1, p. xii and pp. xvii – xviii.

<sup>144</sup> Yitzhak Gil-Har, 'Political Developments and Intelligence in Palestine, 1930 – 40', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, (May 2008), p. 426.

<sup>145</sup> Yitzhak Gil-Har, 'British Intelligence and the Role of Jewish Informers in Palestine', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, (Jan 2003), p. 120.

<sup>146</sup> Gil-Har, 'Political Developments and Intelligence', p. 426.

duties were to 'procure information of a military, political, and topographical nature and to keep in touch with the feeling in the country by touring their districts'.<sup>147</sup>

Because there was no military intelligence structure in Palestine before 1930, and the police rarely collaborated with the military, the British were surprised in August when the violence escalated to the level it did, a point that reinforced the Air Staff placing such importance on an effective intelligence system based upon 'intimate understanding of the habits and mentality' of the local population.<sup>148</sup> Still, the Palestine Police and the RAF SSOs did not always get on well and the Police would sometimes underrate the intelligence provided by the SSOs.<sup>149</sup> This was not a helpful situation, even though, at the Cairo Conference, airmen had pointed out that an efficient intelligence system was required in order to make the air control scheme work.<sup>150</sup>

### **Fully Implementing the Air Control Scheme**

Offensive air actions against the tribes, as stated in British doctrine of the period, was not intended to inflict physical casualties, but rather to influence and compel the locals' behaviour. In 1922, C.D. 22, the RAF's *Operations Manual*, stated, 'The susceptibility of a savage enemy to moral influences is a most important factor in the campaign'.<sup>151</sup> A few years later, writing about the use of the RAF against irregular forces in the British *Army Quarterly*, F.W. Bewsher observed,

It is a matter of the first importance that the population should regard the potentialities of aircraft with considerable awe. If a healthy respect for aircraft and armoured cars is

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<sup>147</sup> Gil-Har, 'Jewish Informers in Palestine', p. 125; also Gil-Har, 'Political Developments and Intelligence', p. 426.

<sup>148</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, *Some Points on the Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, pp. 1 – 2; TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, C.D. 72, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, pp. 8 – 9. Also reflected in R.A. Cochrane, 'The Work of the Royal Air Force at Aden', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 76, no. 501, (Feb 1931), p. 97; Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 352.

<sup>149</sup> Gil-Har, 'Jewish Informers in Palestine', pp. 120 – 21.

<sup>150</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 77.

<sup>151</sup> C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, p. 129.

engendered in the minds of the civil population, the presence of aircraft or armoured cars should produce the necessary results by intimidation and not by definite action. ... It should be a matter of policy, therefore, to inspire in the minds of the civil population, this awe of aircraft on which the moral value of the aeroplane depends.<sup>152</sup>

Sir John (Pasha) Bagot Glubb, as a captain in 1926, presented a paper to RUSI, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions'. In 1921, Glubb, had been serving in Iraq as an Army officer and accepted a transfer to the RAF. Glubb's perspective as an RAF Special Service Officer (SSO), one of the intelligence professionals who were fully embedded in the local culture and populace, is important. He was one of the first, and is possibly the most famous, of the RAF SSOs. The roles, functions, and training of the SSOs will be discussed in the next chapter. Glubb's lecture was based on his years of experience living among and working alongside the Iraqi tribes, working with the British political officers, and applying the effects of air power in Iraq. Glubb, like so many airmen of the time, emphasised the moral element of air control in the section of his lecture titled the 'Unattractiveness of Air Operations'.<sup>153</sup>

For the Bedouin, described Glubb,

After a few years of peace, life becomes so intolerably monotonous that anti-government hostilities are decided upon. These tribesmen are usually experts who delight in such occupations as robberies, ambushes, cutting off detachments and looting the dead. Compared with such operations, hostilities against aircraft are very poor sport. The tribesmen fire away their priceless ammunition with no visible effect whatever, a process most lowering to their own morale.<sup>154</sup>

Haldane, having just left the post of General-Officer-Commanding in Mesopotamia, in his November 1922 lecture at RUSI, stated, 'Arabs, like other Eastern peoples, are accustomed to be ruled with the strong hand. Indeed, there is no denying they respect force

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<sup>152</sup> F.W. Bewsher, 'Cooperation between the Royal Air Force and irregular troops in the desert', *The Army Quarterly*, vol. 12, (Apr 1926), p. 64.

<sup>153</sup> Glubb, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions', p. 778.

<sup>154</sup> Glubb, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions', p. 778.

and force alone'.<sup>155</sup> The articles by Chamier, Bewsher, Glubb, Haldane, and others reflected a prevailing sentiment, at least among the imperialists of the era, towards the indigenous peoples of the 'semi-civilised' world as naturally fierce savages. Peace in the troubled reaches of the empire rested upon 'the prestige of the white man...backed by force'.<sup>156</sup> Heather Streets, in her study of the martial races myth, noted that popular ideology of the era held that 'savages' were particularly manly and biologically disposed towards fighting, heroics, and loyalty to the cause.<sup>157</sup> The language and imagery of martial races in British popular culture, she says, influenced an 'aggressive, soldier-centred imperial culture'.<sup>158</sup> The martial races myth, where all males able to carry a weapon had the potential to become enemy combatants, gives at least partial explanation as to why it was considered less objectionable at the time to bomb Bedouin villages than it was to bomb European cities.

One early example of this martial races attitude is found in RUSI's 1921 Gold Medal essay. C.J. Mackay, in 'The Influence in the Future of Aircraft upon the Problems of Imperial Defence', makes the case that Arab tribesmen were eternal, if not noble, guerrillas and fought for the glory of combat—'these tribes fight for the mere pleasure of fighting'. He goes on to say, 'They are past masters in the art of guerrilla warfare'.<sup>159</sup> Substituting air power for traditional, land-based, punitive expeditions, went the conventional wisdom of the day, frustrated the guerrillas by depriving them of their motivations to fight—glory, loot, and activity.

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<sup>155</sup> Sir Aylmer Haldane, 'The Arab Rising in Mesopotamia, 1920', (29 Nov 1922), *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 68, (Feb 1923), p. 65.

<sup>156</sup> C.D. 4, *Air Staff Memorandum on the policy which should govern the distribution of Air Forces and some considerations as to how they should be employed*, (June 1920), p. 4; also C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, p. 133.

<sup>157</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial races: The military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857 – 1914*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 6 – 8.

<sup>158</sup> Streets, *Martial races*, p. 150.

<sup>159</sup> C.J. Mackay, 'The Influence in the Future of Aircraft upon Problems of Imperial Defence', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 57, no. 466, (May 1922), p. 299.

Air Commodore C.F.A. Portal's 1937 lecture on air policing at RUSI, although primarily intended as a report on the non-kinetic applications of air power as a means of tribal control, repeated this same sentiment,

The air method drives the tribesman away, the army punitive expedition makes him stand and fight; the air method gets results...by being impersonal and by giving it nothing to hit back at; the army expedition causes intense excitement and its essence is battle and death, or glory and loot...<sup>160</sup>

The rest of Portal's lecture described how air control methods had taken a deliberate turn towards non-kinetic considerations by the 1930s. Based upon his experiences in Aden, Portal concluded that the air control scheme was incomplete unless aircraft were also used 'as a means of maintaining contact with the natives and improving their lot'.<sup>161</sup> He suggested that air power could provide a means of relieving economic distress, improving health conditions, providing education, and settling disputes in 'wild country' where civilian agents were non-existent or too few.<sup>162</sup> Portal proposed establishing a network of medical clinics with medical officers flown in to see patients and air ambulances used to evacuate the serious cases. He also recommended using aeroplanes for delivering the mail to isolated communities and transporting civilian authorities into the districts to settle disputes, provide the news, and keep the government informed.<sup>163</sup> His measure of effectiveness for non-kinetic applications of air power was simple. Success was achieved when the locals thought of the 'landing ground not only as a place from which he might be bombed, but also as a point of contact with civilization where he could obtain some of its benefits'.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, 'the success of aircraft in establishing and maintaining the necessary degree of law and order in a wild

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<sup>160</sup> C.F.A. Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', 17 Feb 1937, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 82, no. 526, (May 1937), p. 356.

<sup>161</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 356.

<sup>162</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 348.

<sup>163</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 357.

<sup>164</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 356.

country cannot be complete unless it is possible to follow up operations by using the air to the full as a means of maintaining contact with the natives and improving their lot'.<sup>165</sup>

Interestingly, Glubb, Mackay, Portal, and others' observations from the 1920s and 30s regarding local tribesmen fighting for personal glory and activity rather than strategic objectives has echoes in the present day. In 2009, David Kilcullen observed that local Afghan farmers, upon witnessing a Taliban ambush of an US patrol, rushed home to grab weapons and joined in to fight the Americans soldiers whom they were generally well-disposed towards. When asked why, the farmers replied that 'this was the most exciting thing that had happened in their valley in years and it would have shamed them to stand by and wait it out'.<sup>166</sup> Steven Pressfield, author of the *Afghan Campaign*, probably captured the sentiment best, 'The heart of every tribal male is that of a warrior. What the warrior craves before all else is respect. Respect from his own people, and, even more, from his enemy'.<sup>167</sup> Glubb recorded what American and coalition forces had to re-learn almost a century later, that taking away any opportunity for the tribesmen to fight back and to demonstrate warrior prowess imbued a sense of helplessness. The 'tremendous moral effect [from air control] is largely due to the demoralization engendered in the tribesman by his feeling of helplessness and his inability to reply effectively to the attack'.<sup>168</sup>

Air Staff Memorandum 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, a supplement to Chapter XIV of the *RAF War Manual*, dedicated an entire section to the 'Moral Effect of Air Action'.<sup>169</sup> It clearly stated that air power was intended to achieve its

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<sup>165</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 356.

<sup>166</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 40-41.

<sup>167</sup> Steven Pressfield, 'It's the Tribes, Stupid', originally published in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, (18 June 2006). Mr. Pressfield has since posted the article and five cultural awareness videos on his blog, *Agora*, a forum for discussing counter-insurgency, culture, history, and irregular warfare. [www.agora.stevenpressfield.com](http://www.agora.stevenpressfield.com)

<sup>168</sup> Glubb, 'Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions', p. 782.

<sup>169</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, C.D. 72, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, p. 8.



desired objectives through the threat of force, and also a combination of discomfort and ‘feeling of impotence due to the impossibility of effective retaliation’.<sup>170</sup> This guidance was fully congruent with the earliest tenets of air power, that the threat of decisive attack, i.e., direct attack of those ‘important centres ... upon which the country’s resistance depends’<sup>171</sup> [high value-high payoff targets], would be enough to influence the decisions of the enemy, whether a developed, peer adversary or an ‘uncivilized tribe’ of farmers or herders.<sup>172</sup> The other doctrinally relevant publications from the period also addressed both the direct effects possible through vigorous and sustained aerial attack, as well as the indirect effects to be achieved by non-kinetic means such as reconnaissance, shows of force, transport of political officers to the tribes, and even just the presence of aeroplanes passing overhead. Throughout, the Air Staff’s message consistently reinforced C.D. 22’s original theme of a civic administration with the ability to monitor and report the activities and movements of the tribes and villages, but also having the ability to influence tribal behaviour through coercive techniques.<sup>173</sup> Even the Army’s doctrinal manuals, despite the earlier, long bureaucratic fight against the air control scheme, by 1925 had to concede the value of air power against the tribes, ‘...the moral and material effect of a vigorous and sustained aerial offensive may render operations by troops unnecessary’.<sup>174</sup>

Although the political and military rhetoric focused on the moral domain, achieving desired behavioural changes from the tribes still required actions in the physical domain.

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<sup>170</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, C.D. 72, p. 8.

<sup>171</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual, Part I—Operations*, (July 1928), para. VIII-7.

<sup>172</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual*, para. XIV-3, ‘principles laid down in chapters I, VII, VIII, and IX for the conduct of air operations hold good whether the enemy is a highly developed nation, or an uncivilized tribe maintaining a precarious existence by raising stock or cultivating the soil’.

<sup>173</sup> C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, p. 133. Also in TNA AIR 5/168, C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, Air Ministry Memoranda, Mar 1920, (June 1921), pp. 4 – 6.

<sup>174</sup> *Manual of Operations on the North-West Frontier of India*, (London: Office of the High Commissioner for India, 1925), p. 16. This handbook supplemented the Force Service Regulations and provided guidance as to applying the principles of war during ‘campaigns in undeveloped and semi-civilized countries’, p. 1.

Physical actions to achieve the moral effects desired by the air control scheme must be considered in the context of the period, while not forgetting the technology available and the cultural attitudes that guided colonial decision-making, in addition to the economic and Service issues previously discussed. Aerial targeting in the early days of combat aviation was an imprecise science, primarily because of the immaturity of air power, but also hampered by the state of the technology and the nascent state of British and American educational and theoretical foundations related to air power. Meanwhile, nearly all of the RAF officers who would later serve as senior leaders during the Second World War were gaining experience by policing colonies and Mandates from the air.<sup>175</sup> It would not be until late in the inter-war period that British and American airmen would formulate the strategic offensive and industrial web targeting theories that would guide their later employment of offensive air power during the Second World War. The RAF's collective air control experience, using air attack to shape the moral will of the population, was a major influence on British strategic offensive theory.<sup>176</sup>

British doctrine of the period recognised that killing civilians was counter-productive, and although attacks against rebellious tribes was considered an acceptable means of destroying guerrilla fighters' morale and willingness to fight, every 'endeavour should be made to spare the women and children as far as possible, and for this purpose a warning should be given, whenever practicable'.<sup>177</sup> Operational reports, journal articles, and speeches given by RAF leaders throughout the inter-war period reinforced this point—controlling the actions, and thus the intended and unintended effects of air attack, usually produced a more lasting and beneficial result for the government. Sir Henry Dobbs, the British High Commissioner for Iraq in 1923 – 24 reported,

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<sup>175</sup> Described at Appendix 1.

<sup>176</sup> Scot Robertson, 'The Development of Royal Air Force Strategic Bombing Doctrine between the Wars: A Revolution in Military Affairs?', *Airpower Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, (Spring 1998), p. 43.

<sup>177</sup> C.D. 22, *Operations Manual*, p. 128.

By prompt demonstrations on the first sign of trouble carried out over any area affected, however distant, tribal insubordination has been calmed before it could grow dangerous, and there has been an immense saving of blood and treasure to the British and Iraq Governments. But now, almost before the would-be rebel has formulated his plans, the droning of the aeroplanes is heard overhead, and in the majority of cases their mere appearance is enough.<sup>178</sup>

## Conclusion

By the mid-1930s, Trenchard's air control experiment had become codified in British air doctrine and practice. The RAF's experiences with air power in small wars, against adversaries without any credible ability to defend themselves or to fight back, may have provided the wrong lessons for an air force about to fight a war against another continental military power. The impact air control operations in the reaches of the empire had on Britain's preparedness for the Second World War is well beyond the scope of this study and has been better covered in other works.<sup>179</sup> It is sufficient to note however, that more than ten years of colonial policing certainly influenced how RAF leaders approached offensive air operations. The moral effects of air power on targeted populations were lessons well learned by the RAF after more than a decade of air policing. In 1923, Sir Percy Cox, nicely summed it up,

In every instance air action was only necessary on a surprisingly limited scale. Had it been necessary to exact obedience by the employment of ground troops the cost in time and money, if not also in lives, would have been immensely greater. A further consideration which is very pronounced in dealing with lawlessness, particularly amongst the Euphrates tribes, is the entire elimination, in the case of air action, of

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<sup>178</sup> LHA 15/3/130, *Extract from report by Sir Henry Dobbs on the Administration of Iraq (Colonial No. 13), Apr 1923 to Dec 1924*; also quoted in TNA CAB 24/107, CP 332 (29), 'Fuller Employment of Air Power', p. 32.

<sup>179</sup> Although a significant portion of tribal control operations between the wars were joint operations by air and land forces, some have claimed that, 'between 1918 and 1939 the RAF forgot how to support the Army', Sir Maurice Dean, *The Royal Air Force and Two World Wars*, (London: Cassell, 1979), quoted in David Ian Hall, *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1919 – 1943*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2008), p. xi. Also, Malcolm Smith, *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*, (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1984); Scot Robertson, 'The Development of Royal Air Force Strategic Bombing Doctrine between the Wars'; and Tami Davis-Biddle, 'British and American Approaches to Strategic bombing: Their Origins and Implementation in the World War II Combined Bomber Offensive' in *Airpower: Theory and Practice*, John Gooch, ed., (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1995), pp. 92 – 105. The truth is somewhere in the middle.

provocative effect. Past history has proved that the presence of ground troops in these districts serves as a focus for concentrating rebellious action by the tribes, while any small success on the part of the latter may magnify a minor disturbance into a serious rising. These dangers are altogether avoided by the use of air action.<sup>180</sup>

What cannot be denied is that air control saved the independent Royal Air Force.<sup>181</sup> In 1923, Trenchard wrote to his friend, Sir John Salmond, expressing his gratitude for making the air control experiment in Iraq work. 'I cannot emphasize too much,' said Trenchard, 'the value your successful command in Iraq has been to us'.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, as a result, Air Staff Memorandum 48, *Notes on the History of the Employment of Air Power*, stated,

During the whole period under review, a main factor in the pacification of the country [Iraq] has been the Royal Air Force. By prompt demonstrations on the first sign of trouble carried out over any area affected, however distant, tribal insubordination has been calmed before it could grow dangerous, and there has been an immense saving of blood and treasure to the British and Iraq Governments.<sup>183</sup>

After successes in Somaliland and in Iraq the future of an independent RAF was never really in doubt.<sup>184</sup> By 1922, the Cabinet had accepted the RAF's role as a constabulary force and sought more savings through air substitution elsewhere.<sup>185</sup> Over the next decade, the air control scheme would be applied, tested, and refined in Transjordan, Palestine, the North-West Frontier of India, Sudan, British East Africa, and Aden, sometimes with great success and at other times with mixed results. In 1929, in his final report to the Air Ministry, what Slessor called, 'Boom's last will and testament',<sup>186</sup> Trenchard observed that because the air

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<sup>180</sup> LHA 15/3/130, *Extract from report by Sir Percy Cox on Iraq Administration, April 1922 to March 1923*, p. 30. Also found in TNA AIR 9/12, *The Progress of the Royal Air Force Scheme of Control in Iraq from 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1922 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1923*.

<sup>181</sup> Jafna Cox, 'Splendid Training Ground', p. 176; and Roger A. Beaumont, 'A New Lease on Empire: Air Policing, 1919-1939', *Aerospace Historian*, vol. 26, no.2, (June 1979), p. 86.

<sup>182</sup> MFC 76/1/138, *Letter from Sir Hugh Trenchard to Sir John Salmond*, 6 June 1923.

<sup>183</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 48, C.D. 81, *Notes on the History of the Employment of Air Power*, p. 13, quoting an official British Government report on the Administration of Iraq, 1923-1924.

<sup>184</sup> TNA AIR 5/552 (CID 149-C), *The Part of the Air Force of the Future in Imperial Defence*, (Aug 1921), p. 2.

<sup>185</sup> Ferris, *Men, Money, and Diplomacy*, p. 116.

<sup>186</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 70.

control scheme had been so effective and economical, there were additional roles and in other regions of the empire where air forces might substitute for the Army and the Royal Navy,

In the face of the evidence, which has thus accumulated during the last eight years of air operations carried out under every different condition of climate, of country and of flying weather which are to be found in undeveloped countries, cannot any longer be disputed. The economies to be effected by the fuller employment of air forces rests upon an equally sure foundation of achievement.<sup>187</sup>

But Lawrence cautioned, ‘The [air control] system is not capable of universal application’.<sup>188</sup>

Even Slessor, one of Trenchard’s most ardent admirers, noted, ‘The Air Method was certainly not invariably, instantly and permanently successful in restoring order’.<sup>189</sup> RAF doctrine was clear in its guidance on this point,

Aircraft can seldom be effectively used in support of civil police authorities in thickly and diversely populated areas. Under such circumstances the support of air forces is best confined to reconnaissance, to the dropping of warning notes, to the conveyance of police authorities and to other roles not entailing the use of the offensive armament of aircraft.<sup>190</sup>

As the case studies of Palestine and the NWF showed, application of the air control scheme in other regions of the empire was not always as successful as Iraq had been.

Still, Trenchard’s goal had been to justify and defend the RAF as an independent Service, equal to the Army and Royal Navy. In this he and the air control advocates of the RAF were resoundingly successful. Many of the lessons these officers observed and incorporated into the Air Force’s common practices were related to joint operations with the land forces—RAF liaison officers assigned to the ground forces, an air-oriented intelligence service to provide warning of impending disturbances, aerial insertion of quick reaction forces, aerial re-supply of independent columns deep in enemy territory, air-to-ground communications to direct and assess the effectiveness of air attacks, and rapid medical

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<sup>187</sup> TNA CAB 24/107, CP 332 (29), ‘Fuller Employment of Air Power’, p. 2.

<sup>188</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *T.E. Lawrence to his Biographers*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963), p. 112.

<sup>189</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 69.

<sup>190</sup> TNA AIR 10/2311, *AP 1300 Royal Air Force War Manual, Part I—Operations*, (Feb 1940), para. XIII.

evacuation for sick and wounded soldiers.<sup>191</sup> Sir Percy Cox, during Salmond's March 1925 presentation at RUSI, provided the assessment of air control and the conclusion both Churchill and Trenchard had hoped for:

...there certainly was a natural inclination on the part of the Army in Iraq to gauge the potentialities of the air arm by what one or two machines could do under very unfavourable conditions. ...not unnaturally, one was inclined to be a little sceptical as to what aeroplanes could do by themselves. I have no doubt that I was among the number, but I kept an open mind. ...there can be no question of the success of the Air Force Scheme as evolved in principle at the Conference in Cairo, and as worked by Sir John Salmond. It has succeeded wonderfully. I think he will agree that we were quite ready to be persuaded that the Air Force could do the trick, and I think he has successfully proved that it can.<sup>192</sup>

As there were relatively few casualties on both sides during air policing operations, especially when compared to those the nations had suffered during the Great War, what followed over the next decade and a half were some interesting claims that air power had ushered in an era of greater humanity when it came to punitive actions in undeveloped regions. Salmond managed to strike an interesting compromise in his report on the air control experiment in Iraq. He noted that air warfare, like all methods of warfare is inherently inhumane. But, he tempered the statement by affirming what Trenchard, Lawrence, and others had proposed earlier, that policing 'semi-civilised regions' from the air was 'quicker, more efficient and was accompanied by infinitely less suffering than the older methods of waging war'.<sup>193</sup> This conclusion would shape British air power doctrine, policy, and practices for decades to come.

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<sup>191</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, ASM 20, *Lecture by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond to the Students of the Staff College, Quetta*, pp. 7 – 14.

<sup>192</sup> This was Cox's summation at the end of Salmond's lecture at RUSI. Quoted in J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 498.

<sup>193</sup> J. Salmond, 'The Air Force in Iraq', p. 496.

## Chapter Four

### Intelligence, Influence, and Air Control

The selection of objectives, the grouping of zones, and determining the order in which they are to be destroyed is the most difficult and delicate task in aerial warfare.<sup>1</sup>

Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*

Control of frontiers is political: aircraft are merely a powerful new weapon to assist in that control.<sup>2</sup>

J.A. Chamier, 'Air Control of Frontiers'

A comprehensive and rapid working system of intelligence is essential to the success of air control; the authorities cannot keep the necessary contact with the enemy's morale without such a system.<sup>3</sup>

*Air Staff Memorandum 41*, January 1929

From the moment Italian pilot Lt Giulio Gavotti dropped the first 'bombs' on Turkish troops in Libya, the employment of air power has been overwhelmingly kinetic.<sup>4</sup> While military aviation in the 1920s was full of potential, the state of air power was primitive.<sup>5</sup> Although military aviation after the First World War was rapidly evolving, the primary tools were necessarily kinetic—bombs and bullets to attack enemy targets. Despite this intentional, and understandable, orientation on war-fighting, airmen did envision and later developed non-kinetic applications for aeroplanes in small wars. Sebastian Richie notes that 'historians of inter-war policing tend to focus on proscription bombing to the exclusion of all else', and 'standard' references provide a misleading picture by focusing too narrowly on the offensive and kinetic application of air power'.<sup>6</sup> Although early non-kinetic applications for

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<sup>1</sup> Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1983), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'Air control of frontiers', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 21, no. 3, (1934), p. 417.

<sup>3</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 41, *Some Points on the Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, (1 Jan 1929), p. 2.

air power were rudimentary, the seeds of innovation were there. The technology was evolving and airmen were discovering and refining roles for aircraft beyond war-fighting, in reconnaissance, cartography, agriculture, transportation, and communication.

During the 1919 campaign against the ‘Mad Mullah’ in Somaliland, one of Z-Unit’s DH-9A aeroplanes was outfitted as an air ambulance.<sup>7</sup> A coffin-like structure, sized to take a stretcher and attendant, was fitted to the fuselage behind the pilot.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 4.1,  
Z-Unit DH-9 Air Ambulance**

(Figure 4.1) According to Z-

Unit’s medical officer, eight patients were evacuated from the field to Berbera, approximately 175 miles away.<sup>9</sup> By 1923, the RAF had begun ‘routine AME [aeromedical evacuation] flights from bases in the Middle East’, and by 1925 had ‘acquired two dedicated Vickers Vernon AME transport aircraft, fitted with bench seats and litter positions for patients’.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gerard DeGroot, *The Bomb: A Life*, (London: Random House, 2004), p. 2. Lt Gavotti is given credit for the first bombing raid after dropping four grenades on the Turks, 1 Nov 1911. Also see Walter J. Boyne, *The Influence of Air Power upon History*, (South Yorkshire, UK: Pen & Sword Books, Ltd., 2005), p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> C.D. 22, No. 805, *Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*, (London: Air Ministry, July 1922), p. 11. In describing the various types of aeroplanes and their missions C.D. 22 stated that transport aircraft would be ‘used for carrying parties of infantry up to twelve and for stores. At present this type is not fully developed but it may be expected to have considerable influence on tactics in the near future’. It goes on to note that ‘all types may be used for bombing...but it is not advisable to interchange the duties’.

<sup>6</sup> Sebastian Ritchie, *The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies in the Middle East, 1919 – 1939*, (RAF High Wycombe, UK: HQ Air Command, 2011), pp. 50 and 87fn.

<sup>7</sup> *Flight*, ‘The Operations in Somaliland’, (26 Feb 1920), p. 237; A.S. Glynn, ‘The Transport of Casualties by Air’, *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, vol. 71, no. 2, (Aug 1938), p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Photograph from Crown copyright 2003. Found at [www.raf.mod.uk/history\\_old/line1918.html](http://www.raf.mod.uk/history_old/line1918.html).

<sup>9</sup> IWM, *Private Papers of Air Vice Marshal Sir William Tyrrell*, ‘Notes from RAF Expedition to Somaliland’.

<sup>10</sup> H.A. Treadgold, ‘Aerial Transport of Service Casualties’, *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, vol. 45, no. 5, (Nov 1925), pp. 332 – 33. The inclusion of a flight of transport aircraft for aeromedical evacuation was in the earliest documents arranging for the RAF’s acceptance of responsibility for the defence of Iraq, TNA AIR 9/14, *Arrangements for defence of Iraq by the Royal Air Force*, (28 July 1921), pp. 2 – 3.



In 1922, the RAF introduced the world's first purpose-built military transport, the Vickers Vernon, early evidence of the potential value of air transport as a means of connecting widely scattered parts of the empire.<sup>11</sup> Two squadrons of Vernons, 45 Sqn and 70 Sqn, were among the eight RAF squadrons Trenchard dedicated to Iraqi air policing duties. And, although the commander of 45 Sqn, Arthur Harris, convinced Sir John Salmond to allow him to locally modify and experiment with using the transports as bombers, the aircraft retained their primary roles of troop transport, re-supply, reconnaissance, and medical evacuation throughout the Middle East.<sup>12</sup> Bombing and strafing, or at least the threat of air strikes, was the primary means of influencing locals' behaviour. The use of non-kinetic air power, however, suggests that other, less destructive, applications were considered as possible means of influencing local behaviours.<sup>13</sup> For example, 14 Sqn records note that during 1928, twice weekly reconnaissance flights demonstrated 'to both friendly and unfriendly tribes the mobility and alertness of the Air Force', and as a result 'no shots were fired nor bombs dropped during the year 1928 on any enemy'.<sup>14</sup> And almost as if predicting how transports would be used to move troops and supplies between trouble spots, Chamier reports how aeroplanes were used to insert troops to arrest the leaders of a group causing trouble for British authorities in Mesopotamia, a year before the RAF took control of Iraq.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter examines the process the RAF used to apply the full range air power, and how

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<sup>11</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, Richard Holmes, ed., (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Probert, pp. 52 – 53. Harris' biographer describes how, while commanding 45 Sqn at Hinaidi in 1923, Harris convinced Salmond to allow him to add locally designed bomb racks and cut holes in the noses of his squadron's Vickers Vernon transports for a bomb-aimer. The experiment proved successful and Salmond ordered both squadrons' transport aircraft modified and the crews trained to conduct bombing missions in addition to their primary air mobility functions. According to a medical officer in Iraq at the time, Harris' local modifications for bomb-aiming did not interfere with the Vernon's capability to load stretcher patients through a square door in the nose when the aeroplanes were also used for medical evacuation, Treadgold, p. 341.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Mumford, 'Kurds, Assyrians, and Iraq', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, vol. 20, no. 1, (1933), p. 119. In the discussion after the lecture, a member from the audience made the point that the RAF went beyond punitive bombing by carrying 'doctors and medicine when the need arises'.

<sup>14</sup> Vincent Orange, *Winged Promises*, (RAF Fairford, UK: The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund Enterprises, 1996), p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons,' *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, Vol. 66, No. 462, (May 1921), p. 207.

local intelligence helped determine the appropriate means of causing desired behaviour from the indigenous populations.

Targeting is defined as the process of matching available means, *whether kinetic or non-kinetic* [emphasis added], to attain desired objectives.<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, calling the process ‘targeting’ elicits the perception of air power’s lethal orientation. This kinetic inclination is further reinforced by NATO’s placement of theatre-level, joint targeting guidance and local targeting processes as appendices under the joint fires annex of operations plans and orders.<sup>17</sup> While the RAF of Trenchard and Salmond’s day may have sought to emphasise the moral over the physical domain, desired results were often achieved through coercive influence—actual or threatened physical destruction of what the intended leaders valued most, just as Callwell had earlier advised. Then, as now, air power was applied to influence the decision-makers, targeting the will of the leadership in order to mould the actions of the tribes and villages. The perceived power of aircraft is illustrated by the British Governor of the Somaliland Protectorate, Sir Geoffrey Archer’s, request to not return two DH-9s that had been borrowed from Aden because, ‘their departure deprives me at once of a powerful moral and material factor exercising enormous influence and control over Somalis’.<sup>18</sup>

In constabulary operations, whether military or civilian, the power of the policing force is based upon the targeted populations believing that any violations will be swiftly dealt with. In order to ensure the credibility of air power’s latent impact to compel desired behaviour from local populations, some level of force had to be occasionally applied.<sup>19</sup> Even in those ‘semi-civilised’ regions of the empire with doubtful economic or social value, and where the

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<sup>16</sup> AJP-3.9, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Joint Targeting*, (Brussels, BEL: NATO Standardisation Agency, May 2008), p. 1-1.

<sup>17</sup> *Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive*, (Mons, BEL: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, 17 Dec 2010), p. C-3.

<sup>18</sup> CHAR 17/27, *Paraphrase Telegram from the Governor of Somaliland Protectorate to the Secretary of State for the Colonies*, (13 Mar 1922).

<sup>19</sup> M.J. Armitage and R.A. Mason, *Air Power in the Nuclear Age*, (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1983), p. 3.

colonial objective was primarily stability, indiscriminate applications of air power could be counter-productive.<sup>20</sup> The RAF's *War Manual* from 1928 reminded airmen of the era that whether the opponent was 'semi-civilised' or a peer, the goal was to 'induce the enemy to submit with the minimum destruction of life and property'.<sup>21</sup> Later in the same chapter, the aim of the air operations was not punitive, 'it is most desirable to avoid widespread destruction which may result in a state of famine or deprive the people of their livelihood, thereby creating the very conditions which are most conducive to lawlessness'.<sup>22</sup> And, the choice of correct objectives depended upon a 'comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the psychology of the enemy and of his customs and characteristics, which can only be expected from those who have made a special study of the people'<sup>23</sup>—one of the key roles and responsibilities of the RAF SSOs, in addition to communicating to the local leadership the behaviours desired by the government and the consequences of failing to comply.

After the war the economic potential of the Middle East, especially when compared with Britain's colonies in India and Egypt, was questionable.<sup>24</sup> *The Times*, which before the war had been the 'house organ of imperialism', in 1920, urged the Cabinet to abandon Iraq as an unsustainable expense.<sup>25</sup> Even Churchill sometimes doubted the viability of a future Iraq. In a September 1922 letter to the Prime Minister he expressed his frustration with Emir Feisal's assertiveness, concern about external threats to Iraq, and failure to develop Iraqi oil fields, 'At present we are paying eight millions [£] for the privilege of living on an ungrateful

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<sup>20</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual, Part I—Operations*, Chap. XIV, 'Air Operations in Undeveloped and Semi-Civilized Countries', (July 1928), paras. 19 – 23. This section of the doctrinal manual, entitled 'The Selection of Objectives in Air Operations', describes the challenges of using an inherently kinetic tool to achieve political objectives.

<sup>21</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual* (1928), Chap. XIV, para 10.

<sup>22</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual* (1928), Chap. XIV, para 20.

<sup>23</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual* (1928), Chap. XIV, para 20.

<sup>24</sup> Sir George Cunningham Buchanan in *The Times*, wrote a series of four articles from 23 – 26 Sep 1919 titled 'The Development of Mesopotamia'.

<sup>25</sup> Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc, 2009), p. 159.

volcano out of which we are in no circumstances to get anything worth having'.<sup>26</sup> While the presence of Arabian oil was known in 1920, especially in the Kurdish areas around Kirkuk, the first successful oil well was not sunk until 1927 and full economic potential of Iraqi oil reserves was not to be realised until after the Second World War.<sup>27</sup> As previously noted, some post-war British politicians, such as H.H. Asquith, leader of the Liberal party in 1920, and Lord Islington, in the House of Lords, considered the Mandates as unsupportable and unpopular drains on a depleted Exchequer.<sup>28</sup> What Britain needed most from its mandated territories during the inter-war period was a stable and peaceful region, at minimal cost, in order that she might develop safe and reliable commercial routes to India, Egypt, and Australia.<sup>29</sup> The measure of stability, according to Portal, was simple: a British official could travel unmolested anywhere he wished to go and the tribesmen were not allowed to be rude or shoot at the officer or his aeroplane.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the British took a constabulary approach to control the region. The tactics and methods of policing were often harsh, reflective of lingering 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes toward 'uncivilised' and 'savage' peoples. But times were changing. British airmen were sensitive to the moral implications of bombing civilians. Portal points out that,

'Bomb and scuttle' fails because its users have given too little thought to the vital question, 'What is the *object* [emphasis in original] of the operation?' Surely the object of all coercive police action is to bring about a change in the temper or intention of the

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<sup>26</sup> TNA AIR 23/2, *Situation in Iraq*, (30 Sep 1922); The intelligence assessment from GHQ Iraq noted external threats from Turkey, the French in Syria, [Saudi] Arabia, Persia [Iran], and Soviet Russia, as well as internal dissension between the Kurds, the Shi'a, and nationalist Sunnis. Churchill's frustration was reflected in his conclusion to a letter he wrote to the PM, in CHAR 17/27, *Letter from Winston S. Churchill to David Lloyd George*, (1 Sep 1922).

<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, *City Notes*, 'Mesopotamia Oilfield', (8 May 1920), p. 20. 'The main interest of the British Government lies in the provision of an adequate supply of oil for the nation's needs. It is believed that the oilfield is immensely rich, but it will take five years and more to prove its richness'; Keith Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918 – 1922*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 36, 'Oil production ... in Mesopotamia was as yet hardly more than a hope'.

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, *Parliament*, 'The Cost of Mesopotamia', (22 June 1922), p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Sir Samuel J.G. Hoare, 'Aviation and the British Empire', *Scottish Geographical Society Magazine*, vol. 45, no. 1, (15 Jan 1929), p. 4. Also in *Flight*, (1 Nov 1928), p. 960.

<sup>30</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', 17 Feb 1937, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 82, no. 526, (May 1937), p. 348.

person or body of persons who are disturbing the peace. In other words, we want a change of heart, and we want to get it by the use of the minimum amount of force.<sup>31</sup>

By examining how local intelligence guided the RAF's application of its air control scheme—their process for employing air power to achieve the desired behaviours from the locals, modern airmen might learn appropriate lessons that may apply to future incarnations of irregular warfare.

From the beginning, British airmen developing the air control scheme recognised that in order to substitute air power as an effective means of imperial policing, they needed to be both deliberate in how and where aerial effects were applied, as well as discriminating in their application of air power. Air Marshal Brook-Popham's summation, in the conclusion to Portal's 1937 lecture at RUSI, reminded the attendees that what the RAF was doing was in the colonies and Mandates was constabulary, rather than war-fighting in nature.

What we want to do in these police operations is to achieve peace, and I think if we analyse history or our own experience we shall find that what causes resentment and desire for revenge is the casualties; it may be our own wounds or it may be the death of our relations or friends: those are what cause the bitterness and resentment, which will some day break out again. Therefore, the more we can achieve results with a minimum of casualties the more likelihood there will be of a lasting peace and not merely a temporary truce.<sup>32</sup>

Early doctrinal publications noted the variety of aerial effects available to control and shape the behaviour of indigenous peoples. In addition to bombing and strafing, non-kinetic applications such as reconnaissance, medical evacuation, and transport of civilian political officers were available.<sup>33</sup> The frequent presence of British aeroplanes flying overhead served

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<sup>31</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 350.

<sup>32</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 358.

<sup>33</sup> TNA AIR 5/168, C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, Air Ministry Memoranda, Mar 1920, (June 1921), p. 6. Political officers 'should be taken by air to visit the various native chiefs as frequently as necessary, perhaps daily. The prestige of a political officer who is in a position to say: "I will return tomorrow, or next week, with six aeroplanes, and if my orders are carried out, I promise that no harm will be done to your village".'

as a pervasive reminder of the government's ability to strike where and when it chose.<sup>34</sup> RAF SSOs or the political officers were sure to remind the tribes in their charge of this visible presence of British power—the 'ubiquity of the air arm serves as a constant reminder over widespread areas of the existence of the Government of the country, and this in itself has a tranquilising effect'.<sup>35</sup>

Aerial effects were not normally applied haphazardly.<sup>36</sup> In Iraq, Transjordan, and the NWF, air policing was a joint effort between the local governments and their British advisors. In Palestine, the High Commissioner tended to take a more direct role in order to mediate the persistent conflict between the native Arabs and the immigrant Jews. In each case, though, civilian control was maintained over aerial actions and attacks were made 'only after due consultation with the political authorities in the locality'.<sup>37</sup> Sir John Salmond, in 1924, provided a statement for the record outlining the extent of civilian control in Iraq.<sup>38</sup> In his report Salmond described how requests for air attacks were sent by the British advisor on the scene to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, and then to the British High Commissioner. The High Commissioner would consult with his military advisors before approving any actions.<sup>39</sup> While the political request process Salmond described ensured a necessary level of civilian

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<sup>34</sup> Orange, *Winged Promises*, pp. 73 – 74; Andrew Roe, 'Flying in the Blazing Sun: Air Control, District Intelligence Officers and Mixed Results', *British Army Review*, no. 159, (Winter 2013 – 14), p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> Sir Percy Cox in TNA AIR 9/12, *Extract from Report on Iraq Administration by the High Commissioner, April 1922 – March 1923*, p. 10. This was transcribed into an Air Staff Note, TNA AIR 8/34, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, 1 Aug 1924, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Law enforcement 'theory' notes that effective crime prevention is achieved when police patrols and arrests are focused on specific objectives and troublesome areas. Lawrence W. Sherman, 'Policing for Crime Prevention', *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*, A Report to Congress, (College Park, MD: Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, Chap. XIV, para 20.

<sup>38</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 16, *Statement by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond of his views upon the principles governing the use of air power in Iraq*, (Jan 1924).

<sup>39</sup> ASM 16, *Statement by AM Sir J.M. Salmond*, p. 2.

control and oversight on proposed military actions, military intelligence officers would sometimes complain they were not consulted until it was too late.<sup>40</sup>

When the tactical situation exceeded the capabilities of local police forces to control or for the political official to mediate, the indigenous administrator or his British advisor could request aerial action. If the SSO was available and time permitted, the SSO was supposed to be informed in order to ensure the military intelligence aspect was considered. The request was then forwarded to the British Air Officer Commanding (AOC), who might also be the overall commander of British military forces in the theatre, for consideration, in consultation with the corresponding civil and colonial authorities. If military action seemed warranted, the air staff would analyse the situation and propose a range of military options. The military options would be reviewed by local civilian and security officials, and the SSO if available. This group would recommend a course of action to the AOC and the British High Commissioner that would achieve the intended effects. Simultaneously, the leaders of the offending tribes or villages would be informed of any measures being considered and the consequences of not abiding by the directions of the civil administrators. Should the offenders refuse to comply and continue the unacceptable behaviour, then air attacks would begin under the supervision of local civil authorities or the SSO. These same civilian administrators and military-political observers would assess the effects of the air actions and make recommendations as to the necessity of continuing or halting the bombing, changing the scale, location, or intensity of the bombing, or reverting to other means of influencing the villages' behaviours.<sup>41</sup> (Figure 4.2) The RAF illustrated the process by using an example where the Iraqi district governor on the Euphrates River and his British advisor determined that an inaccessible district could not be brought under control by peaceful methods. In order

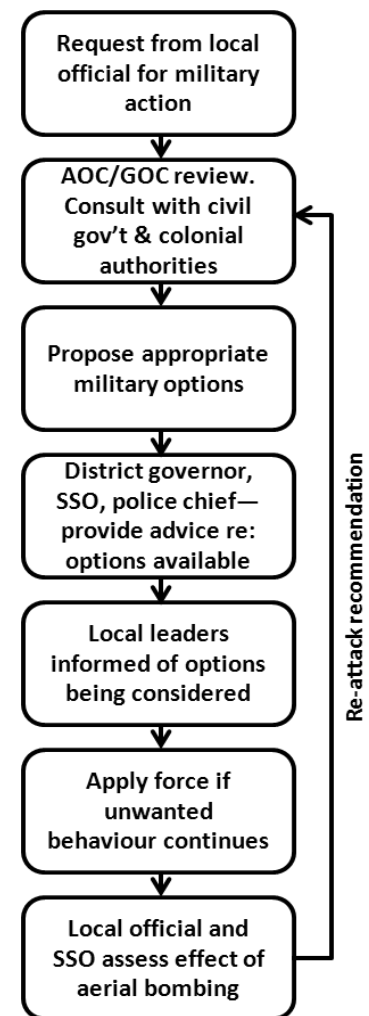
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<sup>40</sup> TNA AIR 23/298, *Note from Glubb to "I" Branch*, (13 Mar 1926), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> TNA AIR 8/34, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, 1 Aug 1924, pp. 3 – 4. The ASN was also transcribed and published in *Flight*, a commercial aviation magazine, on 14 Aug 1924, p. 524.

to protect the neighbouring tribes and develop the district, military action was requested. The description highlighted the interaction between Iraqi and civilian officers, advised by Iraqi and British police, and consultations with ‘Special service officers with a knowledge of local conditions’.<sup>42</sup>

One gets a sense for the frustration SSOs may have felt while trying to work within such a structured, and at times, cumbersome, process given they normally were empowered with great autonomy to collect intelligence, mediate with and among the tribes, and represent the authorities.<sup>43</sup> At times, even benign reconnaissance and demonstration flights were controlled by headquarters. The SSO in Jalibah, Iraq, received a warning from Air Headquarters (AHQ) after reporting that he had instructed a group of Saudi refugees to move ‘or take the consequences of air action’. AHQ in Baghdad admonished him with, ‘Threats of air action on your own responsibility must not be made by you. Specific permission must be obtained from this Headquarters before any air action is taken’.<sup>44</sup> A similar exchange between another SSO and AHQ



**Figure 4.2,**  
**Air Control Process**

further illustrates the level of oversight imposed on the SSOs in order to address concerns regarding the humanity of air control operations. When a tribe in his area of responsibility refused to pay its taxes the SSO warned them of the possible consequences. He then requested a reconnaissance flight the next day to communicate capability and shape the village elders’ perceptions, but also giving the squadron a chance to look at the target before

<sup>42</sup> TNA AIR 8/34, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, pp. 3 – 4.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 32. He describes the attraction for military officers serving as administrators and intelligence officers on the North-West Frontier was ‘powers that were comparable with those of a general’.

<sup>44</sup> TNA AIR 23/298, *SSO Reports*, May 1925.



a strike sortie. AHQ demanded details from the SSO ‘with view to immediate protest being lodged’, wanting the name of the SSO who was ‘threatening shepherds’, the identity of the shepherds, the taxes demanded, and if the shepherds were Iraqi or Saudi.<sup>45</sup>

In 1926, the RAF SSO in Nasiriyah ‘noted with regret’ that a pamphlet outlining the procedures civil authorities would follow when calling for military assistance made ‘no mention of the role of the SSO’. By not including the SSOs early in the decision process, the SSO went on, squadrons would ‘discover the area concerned is unsufficiently [sic] mapped, and that no officer is available to guide the machines’. The success of the operation was therefore ‘left to chance’.<sup>46</sup> The lack of coordination among the civilian officials and military intelligence officers at the local level may be partially explained by the isolation of British political officials.<sup>47</sup> Or, it may have been the normal tension that can exist between civilian and military officials.<sup>48</sup> Concerns regarding the consequences of collateral damage and charges of indiscriminate bombing also provided rationale for the deliberate process Salmond described for vetting air support requests, ensuring civilian control of a civil policing function. There is no evidence that suggests every SSO action was met with such scrutiny, but it does indicate that British civilian and military officials paid attention to how air power was being utilised.

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<sup>45</sup> TNA AIR 23/23, *SSO Reports*, Feb 1926.

<sup>46</sup> TNA AIR 23/298, *SSO Report—Review of ‘Procedure to be adopted when an Iraq Civil Authority wished to call for Military or aerial assistance in case of disorder’*, (13 Mar 1926), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> IWM 4465, *Oral History Interview, Maj Gen H.P.W. Hutson*, (1979), reel 1. Gen Hutson was an SSO in Fallujah, Iraq, as a young officer. He illustrated the isolation of the SSOs by noting that the political officer for his district was in Musayib, 65 miles away.

<sup>48</sup> This sentiment is cleverly captured in a research paper by Rosemary Hansen, a career foreign service officer, and Rickey L. Rife, at the time a serving US Army officer: *Defense is from Mars, State is from Venus: Improving Communications and Promoting National Security*, (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1 June 1998). Mackubin Thomas Owen, in ‘What Military Officers Need to Know about Civil-Military Relations’, *Naval War College Review*, vol. 65, no. 2, (Spring 2012), pp. 67 – 87, notes that ‘civil-military tensions are not new’ and the issues reach beyond the military realm, to include social and political considerations. Also, the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the US Army War College hosted a colloquium in 2008, *Civil-Military Relations in a Post-9/11 World*, to examine the ‘long history of the inherent distrust between politicians and soldiers’ and the difficulties of maintaining ‘requisite bonds of trust and partnership’, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), p. 2.

In *The Sling and the Stone*, T.X. Hammes described how technological intelligence systems were used during the Cold War to dominate conflict through ‘superior targeting ability’ based upon amazing intelligence systems that would provide ‘special insight and dominance’.<sup>49</sup> Hammes concluded that this resulted in a ‘false belief’ among politicians and planners that it was possible overcome the chaos and uncertainty of irregular conflicts using these same systems. As recent, non-state conflicts across Africa and in Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Central America have shown, such an inclination left many airmen ill-prepared for the challenges of modern warfare characterised by the intersection of terrorist groups, transnational criminal organisations, cyber-criminals, humanitarian crises, and pandemics.<sup>50</sup> Hammes went so far as to claim that high technology intelligence systems proved to be irrelevant.<sup>51</sup> Air power historian David Jordan, in *Understanding Modern Warfare*, offered the counterpoint that while air power does offer the commander some powerful options, in order to maximise air power’s contributions to irregular warfare the full range of capabilities and possible effects must be understood and applied.<sup>52</sup> Where Hammes focused on kinetic attacks, Jordan points out that air mobility, reconnaissance and surveillance, and psychological operations have shown they also make powerful contributions in an irregular warfare context by helping to shape the decisions of enemy leadership and the behaviour of populations. The tremendous improvements in sensor technology, precision guidance, and loiter times have extended beyond attack systems to include air mobility and reconnaissance systems, and serve as evidence that airmen and aircraft do evolve and will adapt.

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004), p. 194.

<sup>50</sup> Michael T. Flynn, James Sisco, and David C. Ellis, “‘Left of Bang’: The Value of Sociocultural Analysis in Today’s Environment”, *Prism*, vol. 3, no. 4, (2013), p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Hammes, *Sling and the Stone*, p. 194.

<sup>52</sup> David Jordan, ‘Air and space warfare’, in *Understanding Modern Warfare*, David Jordan, et al, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 211 – 212.

Between the wars, Sir B.H. Liddell Hart offered a strategist's perspective on air power's potential as an indirect means of influencing the opposing leadership. He, like many of his contemporaries, nearly always considered bombing as the means to the desired ends.<sup>53</sup> Liddell Hart's later work expanded upon his theme of the indirect approach, but still it meant using air power to strike 'the enemy's economic and moral centres without having first to achieve "the destruction of the enemy's main forces on the battlefield"'.<sup>54</sup> The value of Liddell Hart's perspective on air power should not be overlooked when considering irregular warfare. As guerrillas will tend to refuse battle unless on favourable terms, and 'destruction of enemy forces' is often difficult to achieve, an air-oriented perspective on the indirect approach appears to be especially valuable.

As with most human endeavours, but especially in those cultures based on social relationships, oral traditions, and collective responsibility as were the Bedouins and the settled tribes of Iraq and Transjordan between the wars, air policing required a personal 'face' to be effective.<sup>55</sup> As early as the Cairo Conference, while the air control scheme was still in the early planning stage, RAF planners knew 'the best officers procurable should be selected for the control of the Intelligence Department as this will be of the most vital importance to the success of the scheme'.<sup>56</sup> Judicious and discriminate applications of air power needed to be shaped through an intentional programme of communicating expectations and managing perceptions at the local levels. For air policing to be effective it required airmen on the ground and among the local populace to control the messaging, collect and analyse

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<sup>53</sup> Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart, *The Strategy of the Indirect Approach*, (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1929), p. 201.

<sup>54</sup> Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1968), p. 358.

<sup>55</sup> Rod Thornton, 'Countering Arab Insurgencies: The British Experience', *Dimensions of Counter-insurgency: Applying Experience to Practice*, Tim Benbow and Rod Thornton, eds., (London: Routledge, 2008), makes the point that Arab traditions are characterised by close-knit, self-reliant, and insular groups which are still maintained today, pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>56</sup> TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123, *Cairo Conference*, p. 77.

information, and control any application of power.<sup>57</sup> These needed to be airmen who fully understood and respected the ethos, culture, and motivations of the people, who would represent the government's demands, and articulate the consequences of failing to comply in a culturally appropriate manner, much as a local police constable might. Then, should force be required, these airmen could direct the aircraft in order to apply whatever amount of force was authorised.<sup>58</sup> Finally, these airmen, by assessing any changes in behaviour resulting from air actions, offered an effective means of determining the effectiveness of actions taken against the targeted populations.<sup>59</sup>

Conrad Crane from the US Army War College observed that the requirement for a human presence on the ground and among the people has remained absolutely vital to information and communications between civil authorities and local populations almost 100 years after the inter-war period. Referring to how adversaries use reports of collateral damage to manipulate local perceptions and passions he stated, 'who controls the ground controls the message'.<sup>60</sup> The most effective of the SSOs used their relationships with tribal leaders and the Arabs' tradition of conversation to 'prevent and settle disputes and to encourage good government by the local rulers'.<sup>61</sup> Disputes among tribes and resolving issues that disrupted desired levels of stability and security were best achieved through

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<sup>57</sup> Thornton, 'Countering Arab Insurgencies', p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Jafna L. Cox, in 'A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919 – 32' *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1985), p. 167, quoting Sir John Bagot Glubb, *Arabian Adventures: Ten Years of Joyful Service*, (London: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, 1978), p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> IWM 4410, *Oral History Interview, Lt Gen Sir John Bagot Glubb*, 26 Mar 1979, reel 2. Glubb described the role of the SSOs as surveying a region and its inhabitants, developing lists of potential targets throughout the region, communicating the actions required by the tribes, guiding aeroplanes to the intended targets, assessing the damages done, and then delivering follow-up messages or relief supplies.

<sup>60</sup> Conrad C. Crane, 'The Lure of Strike', *Parameters*, vol. 43, no. 2, (Summer 2013), p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> TNA AIR 23/320, *Iraq SSO Reports*, (17 Oct 1925), Flt Lt MacGregor describes how he used personal visits with tribal leaders to address local concerns and to encourage 'good behaviour'; TNA AIR 23/269, *SSO Report*, 'Memorandum from Flt Lt Kenny-Leveck to AHQ Baghdad', describes the calming effect of Iraqi soldiers and efforts to address local economic issues that affected the tribes' abilities to pay their taxes; TNA AIR 9/12, *Some fallacies and misconceptions in regard to air control*, (undated, circa 1928), p. 3; Portal, 'Air Force Cooperation in Policing the Empire', p. 348.

traditional means of mediation and negotiation. 'Most tribal control officers warmed to these concepts of collective responsibility, mediation, and reconciliation'.<sup>62</sup>

The concept of Special Service Officers (SSOs) on the ground had not existed in the RAF before the air control scheme.<sup>63</sup> Before 1920, SSOs were Army intelligence officers who provided local, internal intelligence and advice to their British commanders.<sup>64</sup> The problem that the RAF faced as it developed the air control scheme was that not many airmen were willing or able to be that 'face' of British imperial power among the tribes.<sup>65</sup> Like modern airmen, most had joined the Air Force to fly and the thought of a hard, lonely existence on the edges of the empire was an assignment with overwhelming numbers of volunteers. Still, as Glubb noted during his 1926 lecture to RUSI, the whole success of the air control scheme depended 'on the availability of an individual who combines thorough knowledge of the tribes and country, with a certain amount of experience as an air observer'.<sup>66</sup> As the RAF took responsibility for policing the empire, RAF SSOs were needed to understand and apply air-centric methods of policing, as well as learn the local languages, dialects, customs, and traditions well enough to insert British authority among the tribes. The SSOs' secondary role was to represent British military traditions and requirements to the civilian political officers. 'Success,' the architects of the air control scheme realised, 'could not be expected as long as the [RAF and civil] authorities remained in complete ignorance of Bedouin affairs and of events in the desert'.<sup>67</sup>

Although the Air Ministry would have preferred having airmen serving as SSOs, they discovered the possible pool of candidates from which to draw its SSOs was rather shallow.

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<sup>62</sup> Martin Thomas, 'Bedouin Tribes and the Imperial intelligence Services', p. 554.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Role of Special Service Officers in the Air Intelligence Organization', p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> TNA AIR 2/1196, *Notes on Future Intelligence Organisation in Iraq*, (21 Dec 26), p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Sir John Bagot Glubb, *War in the Desert: An R.A.F. Frontier Campaign*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Glubb, 'Air and Ground Forces in Punitive Expeditions', p. 781.

<sup>67</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p. 110.

Excepting the RAF officers who had served in colonial regiments and had transferred to the Royal Flying Corps before or during the First World War, few airmen possessed the requisite knowledge of colonial administration and the region, nor the desire to serve in isolated posts among the native tribes.<sup>68</sup> The Army's traditional role as a colonial constabulary, especially among those officers who had served with Indian Army battalions in the Middle East or in Egypt before and during the war, meant that most candidates with the inclination to work with and among indigenous peoples, live an isolated life in the tribes and village, and having the language, cultural, and administrative skills necessary to work in such an environment, were soldiers.<sup>69</sup> The RAF thus began a campaign to recruit from their own ranks and to bring qualified Army officers into the RAF, realising it was easier and faster to create an 'air sense' among soldiers than it was to develop an intuitive level of cultural awareness and language in airmen who had never lived the frontier life.

It took aggressive recruiting to fill the ranks of the SSOs. Maj Gen H.P.W. Hutson, who served as an SSO in Fallujah, Iraq, said he took the job because he was already assigned in Mesopotamia when the First World War ended and the RAF would pay him an additional £20 (about £850 today) per month for learning Arabic—not an impossible task as he was the only Englishman at the time in the city.<sup>70</sup> Glubb, although an army officer, in 1920 was already in Iraq and learning Arabic, so he, too, accepted a position with the RAF.

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<sup>68</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p. 70; and Andrew Roe, 'Blazing Sun', p. 67.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 182 – 83. TNA CO 732/41/23, *Recruitment of Intelligence Officers for Iraq & Palestine*, (20 Dec 1929 – 22 Feb 1930), provides a series of letters that detail the difficulties the RAF was having 'finding suitable officers for intelligence duties in Iraq, Egypt and Palestine'. The RAF proposed to offer Short Service Commissions to Army officers who spoke 'one or more Eastern languages' and whose contracts had recently or were about to expire with the Iraqi Army.

<sup>70</sup> IWM 4465, *Hutson Oral History Interview*, reel 1. IWM 4492, *Oral History Interview, Brig Edward H. Tinker*, 24 Oct 1979, reel 1, tells of a similar experience while serving with the Transjordan Frontier Force. He reported that even when more than one Englishman was in an area, they would usually speak Arabic among themselves in order to not create animosity among their indigenous counterparts who did not speak English.

The 1928 version of the *RAF War Manual* clearly stated the essence of the irregular warfare problem. Without enemy ‘forces to destroy’ or war-making industries to eliminate, the RAF had no conventional, potentially decisive targets against which to plan its air operations.<sup>71</sup> For Trenchard’s offensive-minded air force, this could have been a challenge. Placing culturally astute airmen who spoke the local dialects and were ‘thoroughly acquainted with tribal life’ among the local populace gave the RAF the ability to discover the locals’ requirements and vulnerabilities.<sup>72</sup> The SSOs’ cultural, psychological, social, and economic understanding became the key to effective application of the full range of air power’s capabilities during policing operations.

The material objectives presented by a semi-civilised enemy are seldom of such individual importance that the destruction of one or more of these will prove decisive. In the absence of vulnerable organizations, attacks on the mode of life of the enemy have to be carried out directly against the people themselves or their possessions, and in this connection it is important that the aim of the operation should be borne in mind. For these reasons the selection of the correct air objectives demands a comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the psychology of the enemy and of his customs and characteristics, which can only be expected from those who have made a special study of the people.<sup>73</sup> [emphasis added]

Europeans’ efforts to understand the Bedouin and the settled tribes were hindered by the tribes’ natural reluctance to share their oral histories, traditions, and news with outsiders. This was compounded by long-standing prejudice against the Bedouin among mainstream Arabs throughout the Middle East. Middle-class Arabs, especially those gravitating towards the growing urban centres in the region and those who embraced European influences, tended to disdain the Bedouin tribesmen as unsophisticated and boorish.<sup>74</sup> Although the British had produced credible area and intelligence studies cataloguing the make-up of Iraq’s non-urban

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<sup>71</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, *RAF War Manual* (1928), Chap. XIV, para 19.

<sup>72</sup> ‘The Role of Special Service Officers in the Air Intelligence Organization’, *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1, (Jan 1931), p. 52. No author given.

<sup>73</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, Chap. XIV, paras. 19 – 20.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 180.

social divisions: nomads, semi-nomads, and cultivators,<sup>75</sup> Glubb reported that British and Iraqi officials never seemed to understand the essential fact of Middle Eastern nomadic life.<sup>76</sup> Bedouin were herders, noted Glubb, and thus their livelihood, income, and ability to pay taxes were tied to the changing locations of quality grazing areas.<sup>77</sup> Glubb also accused the Iraqi government of being completely indifferent to the Bedouins and to tribal life.<sup>78</sup> Iraqi government officials often accused the tribes of moving into the desert areas just to cause trouble, and when the tribes asked for protection from Saudi raiders they were dismissed and told it was best if they not go into the desert if they were afraid.<sup>79</sup>

### **Learning to Live Among the Tribes**

Britons seeking insight into the culture, traditions, and motivations of the Bedouins had little in the way of credible, Arab sources to use as references. Arab sources written in English were sparse and what documentation that did exist all but ignored the tribes and tribal culture.<sup>80</sup> According to Priya Satia, the casual researchers tended to drift towards travelogues, *Arabian Nights*, and novels.<sup>81</sup> Taken out of context, this assessment seems a bit damning. Fletcher suggests that the *Royal Central Asia Society* through its journal and meetings offered detailed studies, thoughtful debate, and a perspective beyond Indian traditions, in essence an ‘archive of instruction’ that was broad beyond the Indian experience

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<sup>75</sup> IWM ID 1118A, *Royal Navy Geographical Intelligence Handbook, A Handbook for Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, Naval Staff Intelligence Department, (Nov 1918), pp. 96 – 98.

<sup>76</sup> For example, see TNA FO 141/446, *Confidential Notes on the Mosul Frontier Question*, (22 Sep 1923). The intelligence appraisal by the RAF Special Service Officer, F.R. Maunsell, noted that, ‘Nomads were a constant source of trouble [to the local authorities] and any effective control remains as far off as ever’, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, pp. 24 – 26.

<sup>78</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p. 108. ‘The Iraq Government, it must be admitted, was completely indifferent to Bedouins, tribes, and deserts, and lived in another world...’

<sup>79</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p. 172.

<sup>80</sup> Robert S.G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and ‘The Tribal Question’*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 28, ‘with both the [Royal Central Asia] Society and frontier administration functioning primarily through and for the literate, those most obviously excluded were Britain’s nomadic subjects’.

<sup>81</sup> Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire in the Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 166. Satia called *Arabian Nights* a ‘ubiquitous prerequisite’ for those serving in the Middle East.



and of sufficient depth to promote a higher degree of professionalism among colonial administrators bound for the region.<sup>82</sup> This should not diminish the contributions of travel writing and the published letters of explorers and overseas public servants before and after the First World War. JRCAS and travel writing were ‘inextricably linked to the spread of European power’. The written word sparked imaginations and drew the adventurous and imaginative to those unexplored regions on the map in the hope of political and economic opportunity.<sup>83</sup> These writings were a catalyst for ‘imperialism and colonization’. For British military and civilian professionals, there were in-depth, fairly current, and voluminous reference materials, albeit rarely from Arab sources, by which to prepare for assignments in the region.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to the professional journals and regional studies, the Admiralty published a collection of intelligence handbooks between 1913 and 1917 based in part on the records of pre-war European explorers and on recent military intelligence.<sup>85</sup> These handbooks offered detailed descriptions of the regions, settlements, routes, and inhabitants. In November 1918, the Admiralty published an updated version of the *Handbook for Mesopotamia*.<sup>86</sup> This four-volume, 550-page, encyclopaedia broke the country into sections, including Kurdistan, and

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<sup>82</sup> Fletcher, *British Imperialism and the ‘Tribal Question’*, pp. 44 – 45.

<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey P. Nash, ed., *Travellers to the Middle East from Burckhardt to Thesiger: An Anthology*, (London: Anthem Press, 2011), p. xi.

<sup>84</sup> Examples include John G. Lorimer’s six volume geographical, historical, and navigational survey, the *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, from 1915. It remains a valuable tool for modern researchers. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed at [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) on 26 Dec 2013. The Army and the RAF had combined to prepare topographical references to aid the 1918 Palestine campaign—*Handbook on Northern Palestine and Southern Syria*, Apr 1918; *Notes on Water in Northern & Central Palestine*, Apr 1918; and *Topography of Central Palestine*, 15 Sep 1918, that were still available for self-study by SSOs after the war, cited in Yigal Sheffy, *British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1914 – 1918*, (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1998), p. 309.

<sup>85</sup> *Military Handbooks of Arabia 1913–1917*, Cambridge Archive Editions, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Hugh Clout and Cyril Gosme’s history and evaluation of the handbooks in ‘The Naval Intelligence Handbooks: a monument in geographical writing’, notes that the handbooks first produced for the First World War provided a precedent for geographical and intelligence analysis through the Second World, remained valuable, despite being outdated in certain areas, through the present, *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 27, no. 2, (Apr 2003).

<sup>86</sup> IWM ID 1118A, *Royal Navy Geographical Intelligence Handbook, A Handbook of Mesopotamia*, Naval Staff Intelligence Department, (Nov 1918). These were references available to British military personnel during the inter-war period. The handbooks were updated again in the 1940s and are still used as references.

provided great detail on such topics as the different tribal systems, religion, descriptions of towns and cities, census data, descriptions of the inhabitants, administrative structures, topography, history, and climate. Volume 2, which covered the Shatt el-Arab, the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys, and the desert border areas with Kuwait and the (now) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, even had an assessment of the various types of mules available in the region. Similar handbooks were also produced for Syria (including Palestine) and Arabia in 1920.<sup>87</sup> Semi-official references available included Gertrude Bell's, *The Arab of Mesopotamia*, a two-volume collection of essays written specifically for new British officers going to Iraq,<sup>88</sup> and *Straight Tips for "Mespot"*, a volume of practical hints that offered the kinds of advice 'your maiden aunt would not be likely to suggest', such as 'the value of gin and whiskey to aid health'.<sup>89</sup>

The most successful SSOs tended towards a combination of self-study and on-the-job training.<sup>90</sup> Once in their assigned regions, the officers would immerse themselves in the regional culture and in the process create a personal body of knowledge, an 'intelligence database' in modern parlance, by learning from the locals they worked with and through personal study of the terrain, customs, histories, and relationships among families, clans, and tribes. They essentially became localised versions of a romanticised T.E. Lawrence.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> IWM ID 1215, *A Handbook of Syria (including Palestine)*, (1920); and IWM ID 1128, *A Handbook of Arabia*, (1920).

<sup>88</sup> Gertrude Lowthian Bell, *The Arab of Mesopotamia*, (Basrah: Superintendent, Government Press, 1917), reprinted and edited by Paul Rich, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, Books, 2008), p. vi.

<sup>89</sup> IWM, *Straight Tips for "Mespot"*, (Bombay: Thacker and Co., Ltd., 1917), (no author given), p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> IWM 4410, *Glubb Oral History Interview*, reel 1; IWM 4465, *Hutson Oral History Interview*, reel 1.

<sup>91</sup> After the war, Lowell Thomas, an American journalist, created a series of theatrical productions to create the 'Lawrence of Arabia' persona. The effect of Thomas' shows on British attitudes and politics are well documented. See for example, Malcolm Brown, *T.E. Lawrence*, (London: The British Library, 2003), p. 108. See also Robert Graves and Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart, *T.E. Lawrence to his biographers Robert Graves and Liddell Hart*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1976), original published in 1938. Interestingly, although the Royal Central Asian Society, after 1935, conferred the Lawrence of Arabia Memorial Medal to recognise imperial service, members 'were loath to bracket themselves with Lawrence and his legend'. Arnold Wilson 'savaged *Revolt in the Desert*', and attacked 'Lawrence's vanity, conscious artistry and intellectual snobbery'. C.S. Jarvis wrote that *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was 'too enraptured with the Bedouin' and afforded them 'a dignity their conduct seldom deserved', Fletcher, p. 48.

Interestingly, in 2010 US Special Operations Command applied this model by creating *Project Lawrence* in order to increase the language and cultural understanding among its Army, Navy, and Air Force operators, and re-orient them back to the traditional US special operations approach of indirect engagement.<sup>92</sup> Project Lawrence used ‘Twenty-Seven Articles’, a list of ‘commandments’ written by Lawrence for the 20 August 1917 edition of the *Arab Bulletin*, as its guiding credo. Among the twenty-seven articles was the direction to ‘Learn all you can about your [hosts]. Get to know their families, clans and tribes, friends and enemies, wells, hills and roads. ... Get to speak their dialect of Arabic, not yours’ and ‘the beginning and ending of the secret of handling Arabs is unremitting study of them’.<sup>93</sup>

British perception of tribal life in Iraq and Transjordan was generally that Bedouin lived according to collective responsibility, with decisions based upon consensus, mediation, and reconciliation.<sup>94</sup> Still, there was always one person who exercised a higher level of responsibility within the group. Rod Thornton pointed out that the second most important characteristic of Arab culture is the authoritarian rule—concentration of power in a central authority.<sup>95</sup> Two of Lawrence’s Twenty-seven Articles emphasised the importance of the leader in Arab culture. Therefore, culturally appropriate targeting efforts in the Middle East took a leadership-centric approach, but through indirect means, namely inconveniencing the families, clans, and tribes in order to influence leadership decisions. What the RAF achieved was a combined, leadership and population-centred approach—shaping leaders’ decisions by

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<sup>92</sup> Michael Evans, ‘Special Forces get lessons from Lawrence of Arabia’, *The Times*, (2 Apr 2010); in Karen Parrish, ‘Special Operations Focuses on World’s “Unlit Spaces”’, *American Forces Press Service*, 10 Feb 2011, ADM Eric Olsen, the commander of US Special Operations Command, noted that it is the indirect approach that ultimately leads to decisive effects in irregular warfare, vice the ‘man-hunting, thing-hunting, direct-action piece’.

<sup>93</sup> The *Arab Bulletin* was produced by the Arab Bureau in Cairo between June 1916 and Aug 1919. Lawrence was an editor and contributor to the reports. The *Bulletin*, secret when published, contained intelligence summaries associated with the Arab Revolt, analyses of political situations in Arabia, and historical, geographic, and scientific data related to Arabia. Gertrude Bell and Ronald Storrs were also contributors. Accessed at [http://telstudies.org/writings/works/articles\\_essays/1917\\_twenty-seven\\_articles.shtml](http://telstudies.org/writings/works/articles_essays/1917_twenty-seven_articles.shtml) on 12 Dec 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections*, (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 55; Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 185.

<sup>95</sup> Thornton, ‘Countering Arab Insurgencies’, p. 4.

affecting what they valued most—peaceful, productive, and stable villages.<sup>96</sup> In order to maintain the peace and control the behaviour (ends) of the indigenous population, the British effectively used non-kinetic means such as aerial reconnaissance, air transport of security forces, government officials, and supplies, and leaflet and message drops, in addition to air strikes, in order to implement low-cost campaigns of persuasion and coercion (ways).

Although the British used the tribal sheikhs to gain compliance from the villagers, the British avoided the Ottoman practice of imprisoning the local sheikhs whenever members of a tribe committed an offence. The British observed that the Turks' direct and often brutal approach towards local leaders tended to dissuade all but the most stalwart from serving as sheikhs. And, as Glubb stated, without some form of leader to represent the group, the Turks lost their conduits to communicate with and control the tribes' members.<sup>97</sup> In general, the British appreciated the importance of the various levels of sheikhs because they needed them as mediators and regulators of internal matters, but also as empowered representatives of the group when dealing with external issues.<sup>98</sup> For the sheikhs, 'government recognition brought with it responsibility, reward, and prestige', as well as strengthening their position in the tribes and among rivals.<sup>99</sup>

The better SSOs knew that the best way to collect and understand the population's attitudes and opinions was gained by observing the social behaviour and participating in the locals' conversations first hand.<sup>100</sup> Glubb tells the story of one of his first experiences as an SSO.<sup>101</sup> He was sent to deliver the message to a settlement between Baghdad and Basrah that

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<sup>96</sup> TNA AIR 23/269, *Iraq SSO Report*, (24 Dec 1924), pp. 1-2; reports that after the RAF destroyed the homes and property of Iraqi agitators in the Hammar Lakes region the village sheikhs came into the local government office to sign agreements making the local sheikhs responsible for the behaviour of their villages and public security in their areas, but also asking that the British ensure the agitators did not return.

<sup>97</sup> Glubb, *War in the Desert*, p. 168.

<sup>98</sup> Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 83.

<sup>99</sup> Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, p. 84.

<sup>100</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 78.

<sup>101</sup> IWM 4410, *Glubb Oral History Interview*, reel 2.

they were to pay their taxes or be bombed.<sup>102</sup> The British political officer assigned to administer the area had confined himself to the larger town in the area because he felt it too dangerous to venture out among the locals. Correspondingly, the village sheikhs were afraid to go into town and consult with the political officer for fear of imprisonment. Glubb and his interpreter proceeded alone into the desert and called at the paramount sheikh's home. At that point Arab hospitality took over. For two days he and the local sheikhs talked. Glubb learned that the issue was water—because the Iraq government did not regulate water flow, upstream users had divert all the water needed to irrigate their crops. Without water the crops died and without crops they had nothing to sell and therefore no money to pay the taxes. At that point, Glubb says he admitted to his hosts that his real role had been to survey the villages, create a map, and develop a target list in order that he might guide aeroplane attacks to appropriate homes in the villages. He advised the sheikhs to report to the political officer or be bombed. The next day Glubb led a flight of aeroplanes that overflowed the villages. The people scattered and hid after which the RAF bombed houses and scattered the flocks. No one was seriously injured, though. The sheikhs then came into town where Glubb had arranged for the Iraqi Minister of the Interior to meet with them. Glubb then mediated the meeting, during which an agreement was reached to regulate the water, which would, in turn enable the tribes to pay their taxes. Success was achieved because the SSO understood the social structure, mediated the differences between the locals' problems and the government's demands, and then judiciously applied air power to induce the sheikhs to act.<sup>103</sup>

The SSOs went beyond simple and occasional professional recognition of indigenous leadership. Instead they built relationships with local leaders in order to gain insight into the

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<sup>102</sup> Jafna Cox noted that the practice of bombing for failure to pay taxes had been employed as early as 1919, well before the air control scheme was implemented, 'Splendid Training Ground', p. 157.

<sup>103</sup> IWM 4410, *Glubb Oral History*, reels 1 and 2.

tribes' psychological, cultural, and sociological motivations.<sup>104</sup> H.P.W. Hutson described how he often visited the different nomadic tribes and small villages around Fallujah in order to build and maintain relationships with the sheikhs, gain insight into their situations, and address their concerns where he could. Hutson was successful as an SSO because he 'got friendly with many of the sheikhs and especially the younger chaps'.<sup>105</sup> His perspective was that it was the informal relationships, in addition to formal communication and negotiation, which gave SSOs insight and understanding of populations and made them successful.

In her culturally oriented examination of British intelligence services in Iraq between the wars, Satia found that the SSOs were expected to develop a 'comprehension of another universe that was, in the orientalist vision, cosmically ordered, a closed system of meanings'.<sup>106</sup> In other words, they were to transcend their 'Britishness' through extended immersion in Arab society, learning the local customs, colloquialisms, slang, and body language, and perfecting their language skills to the point of having 'the feeling of the Middle East in their blood'. In order to develop such depth of understanding, SSOs were 'appointed to districts throughout the country for the duty of getting to know the Sheikhs personally and studying the tribes and the country by touring'.<sup>107</sup> In the process the best SSOs developed a deep, ingrained, level of insight that Satia equated to 'intuition'.<sup>108</sup>

When air attacks were authorised, the intent was for the SSOs to brief the aircrews on which targets to be strike and also those that should not be damaged. On occasion the SSOs

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<sup>104</sup> Andrew M. Roe calls this 'developing cultural acuity', going beyond just learning the language and getting to the point that one gains 'in-depth understanding of cultural norms and standards', 'What Waziristan Means for Afghanistan', *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1, (Winter 2001), p. 42.

<sup>105</sup> IWM 4465, *Hutson Oral History Interview*, reel 1.

<sup>106</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 111.

<sup>107</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, *Some fallacies and misconceptions in regard to air control*, p. 3; also Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 254.

<sup>108</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 117. Andrew M. Roe, in 'What Waziristan Means for Afghanistan', *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 1, (Winter 2011), p. 42, noted that in-depth cultural acuity and ability to speak the language were key to gaining influence among Pashtuns, but required 'a lifetime of specialized study and long periods of unbroken service'.

would fly in the lead aeroplane or else ride in an RAF armoured car to direct the air strikes, serving in what we would recognise as a ‘forward air controller’ role. After the air action had been completed, the SSO would then assess the results and recommend follow-on courses of action to be considered by the political authorities.<sup>109</sup> The SSOs were both intelligence and operations professionals, able to exploit the capabilities of air power in order to achieve desired effects at the local level.

### **Targeting and Effects**

The RAF’s ‘well developed and swift system of intelligence’ was therefore optimised for collecting and interpreting information on the local populace and also for developing and delivering the government’s messages in a culturally and ethnically appropriate manner. It was no coincidence that British airmen and civil authorities in Iraq initially, and later in other colonies, made it a point to maximise the psychological impact of air power in order to control the ‘semi-civilised’ tribes. Air Staff Memorandum 41 stated, ‘It is no exaggeration to claim that half the moral effect on which the Air relies to achieve its ends is gained by instantaneous action; and for this to be possible the speed of the aeroplane must be supplemented by a corresponding rapidity in the service of information’.<sup>110</sup> In the oral and personal culture of the Arabs, the successful SSOs were those able to sense ‘without the intervention of any reasoning process’<sup>111</sup> and go beyond simple procedural and declarative

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<sup>109</sup> The desire for collaboration among the political officers, SSOs, and police is a common thread in the professional literature. For example, Sir John Salmond, ‘The Air Force in Iraq’, 25 Mar 1925, *RUSI Journal*, vol. 70, no. 479, (Aug 1925), p. 492; A.P.C. Hannay, ‘Empire Air Policy’, *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4, (Oct 1930), p. 646; ‘The Role of Special Service Officers in the Air Intelligence Organization’, p. 53; and C.F.A. Portal, ‘Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire’, *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 82, issue 526, 17 Feb 1937, (May 1937).

<sup>110</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Satia, *Spies in Arabia*, p. 117.

knowledge and get to analytic knowledge based upon local mores, relationships, community values, and beliefs.<sup>112</sup>

It is possible to equate what the RAF SSOs did to integrate air power into imperial policing practices with the modern targeting process. Using local political and administrative guidance the SSOs had to decide how, where, and to what extent air, ground, and civil elements of power might be used to deter disobedience and compel compliance from the local population. In the course of normal interactions with tribal leaders, the SSOs would gather and evaluate information, what Lawrence called ‘unremitting study’, in order to develop a comprehensive intelligence picture of their assigned regions.<sup>113</sup> Consistent with Lawrence, Sir John Slessor, noted that in order to select ‘those objectives whose destruction or interruption will be most inconvenient to the enemy’ the intelligence officer required ‘an intimate acquaintance with such details as the locations and condition of his forces’. He went on to say the intelligence staff must ‘put themselves into the enemy’s mind’.<sup>114</sup> Nine decades later, that guidance still rings true. In order to discern how air power might achieve desired preventative effects in an irregular environment, an airman’s level of knowledge and understanding needs to go beyond a conventional military perspective and become more esoteric to include the history, customs, language, philosophy, religion, and ethics of the local peoples, what Lt Gen Flynn called ‘social radar’ that allows informed decisions regarding influencing actions prior to conflict erupting.<sup>115</sup>

Once immersed in the anthropology of an area, airmen will also need to develop insights into the psychology and motivations of the targeted group and its leaders, as well as the

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<sup>112</sup> Jessica Glicken Turnley, *Cross-Cultural Competence and Small Groups: Why SOF are the way SOF are*, (MacDill AFB, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>113</sup> Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00, *Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, (Shrivenham, UK: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Aug 2011), pp. 1-8, offers that this step is the combination of situational awareness and analysis, leading to insight.

<sup>114</sup> Sir John C. Slessor, *Air Power and Armies*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 88.

<sup>115</sup> Michael T. Flynn, James Sisco, and David C. Ellis, “‘Left of Bang’: The Value of Sociocultural Analysis in Today’s Environment”, *Prism*, vol. 3, no. 4, (2013), p. 14.



interplay between the environment, the local population, and any enemy combatants. This need to sense sometimes induces an uncomfortable, but often necessary, ambiguity into the process, which is why Lawrence cautioned to not engage in deep conversations until one could understand the allusions and communications nuances.<sup>116</sup> Sensing requires fluency with the subtle, usually non-verbal cues of a culture and communications, awareness of the nuanced relationships among families, clans, sects, and classes, and developing one's own relationship with indigenous leadership in order to comprehend the range of opportunities and local threats to be addressed. Successful policemen will often develop such a level of sensing within their beats, to the point knowing that something is amiss simply by feeling that conditions have changed.

Effective sensing allows leaders, planners, and targeteers to comprehend the totality of a situation so they might understand how air actions will affect the decisions, motivations, loyalties, allegiances, and relationships of the intended 'targets'.<sup>117</sup> Understanding how the leadership and their followers will likely react to actions allows airmen to develop a comprehensive program of positive and negative, and indirect and direct, means that is applicable to the whole of the situation—environment, local population, and adversary leadership, or a plan to use air power to influence. Understanding involves the 'development of knowledge to such a level that it enables insight and foresight'.<sup>118</sup> The final step then, is to assess the effects achieved in order to continuously adjust the plan until desired results are attained.

Assessing the effectiveness of influencing operations can sometimes be a challenge because of the subjective nature of human factors measurements. It is difficult gauge fear,

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<sup>116</sup> Lawrence, 'Twenty-seven Articles'.

<sup>117</sup> Joint Doctrine Publication 04, *Understanding*, (Shrivenham, UK: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Dec 2010), p. 2-1. Also Sir Stephen Dalton, 'Combat Operations: The Asymmetric Advantage of Air Power', *RUSI Lord Trenchard Memorial Lecture*, 14 Sep 2009, found at [www.rusi.org/events/ref:E49F57A7E80B64/](http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E49F57A7E80B64/).

<sup>118</sup> JDP 04, *Understanding*, p. 2-1.

confidence, trust, perception, etc., especially if trying to do so in a foreign culture.<sup>119</sup> While a few objective indicators, such as taxes paid, weapons turned in, or the absence of inter-tribal raiding were available to the RAF during the inter-war period, these measurements did not provide the government with metrics regarding discontent, frustration, resentment, or deceit, all which might serve as important warnings of impending lawlessness and conflict. Such subjective indicators required an acculturated airman among the population learning, sensing, and understanding the operational environment in order to recommend appropriate applications of air power. As Dowding noted after the 1929 Palestine riots, without SSOs in and among the people,

No matter how strong or efficient the normal police may be, they cannot hope to stamp out internal disorder before it becomes serious, unless they have behind them an intelligence system which will give them full and timely warning of impending disorders, and of the various subterranean activities from which they spring.<sup>120</sup>

### **Influencing the Decision-makers**

In the July 1934 issue of *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, Flight Lieutenant E.J. Kingston-McCloughry attempted to answer a question regarding the ‘inhumaneness’ of air control in undeveloped countries. In his essay he described how air actions were ‘aimed at the leader and his adherents while leaving the innocent untouched’.<sup>121</sup> Using what was considered an indirect approach at the time, the ‘inverted blockade’ was developed and used to keep the people out of their villages instead of blockading them inside.<sup>122</sup> This tactic forced the villagers and tribesmen out of their homes, scattered the herds and flocks, limited access to water sources, damaged buildings, and generally disrupted the normal patterns of life. The

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<sup>119</sup> JDP 2-00, *Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations*, pp. 1-5, 2-2, and 4-13.

<sup>120</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Notes on the Future Garrison of Palestine (with Special Reference to Air Vice Marshal Dowding's Appreciation of 25 September)*, (9 Oct 1929), p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, ‘The Gordon-Shephard Memorial Prize Essay, 1933’. *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 3, (July 1934), p. 250.

<sup>122</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 62.

*RAF War Manual* stated that the intent was to make life for the villagers very uncomfortable, but not so egregious as to create a flood of refugees or induce a level of animosity that led to lawlessness.<sup>123</sup> With living patterns disrupted, the people would eventually force their leaders to acquiesce to government demands.<sup>124</sup> Through the inverted blockade, the RAF indirectly influenced, or ‘targeted’, the local sheikhs, the decision-makers who represented the collective will of the tribes. But rather than defaulting to capturing or killing the tribal leadership, the RAF exploited the Arabs’ culture of collective responsibility and applied indirect methods to shape leaders’ decisions. The goal was to convince the leadership that acceding to the government’s demands was a better course of action than resisting.

In the 1928 version the *RAF War Manual*, the chapter on ‘Air Operations in Undeveloped and Semi-Civilised Countries’ specified that any air strike had to be preceded by warnings in order to allow the tribes time to move women, children, and valuables out of harm’s way. While this requirement admittedly forfeited the element of surprise and gave up a powerful psychological tool, the warnings help prevent ‘the useless destruction of life which would be likely to prejudice the subsequent re-settlement of the district’.<sup>125</sup> The 1928 *War Manual* went on to recommend non-kinetic demonstrations by aircraft, in conjunction with the warnings, in the further hope of avoiding destructive attacks.<sup>126</sup> The inverted blockade tactic used a combination of power, presence, and perception to influence tribal behaviour.

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<sup>123</sup> *RAF War Manual, Part 1*, Chap XIV, para 20.

<sup>124</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, Air Staff Memorandum 46, *Note on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, (24 Mar 1930), p. 8. Also TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, p. 14.

<sup>125</sup> *RAF War Manual, Part 1*, Chap XIV, para 26.

<sup>126</sup> *RAF War Manual, Part 1*, Chap XIV, para 26.

With RAF aeroplanes flying overhead creating the illusion of a ubiquitous government presence,<sup>127</sup> the SSOs would create and sustain a perception in the civilians' minds that every aeroplane overhead was looking at or for them. Tactics such as having aircraft patrols take circuitous routes in order to 'pass within sight of as many tribal camps as possible', making the Lewis guns in the rear cockpit conspicuous, and shooting off Very flares after dark to advertise their presence, reinforced the perception of power and presence.<sup>128</sup> And in order to gain maximum effect from each air attack, the SSOs would publicise the results of air strikes among other camps and villages.<sup>129</sup> As the news spread among the other tribes and villages in a region, the SSOs' and the British government's coercive credibility were maintained by the locals' perception that the government would use force as it threatened.<sup>130</sup> These same sorts of demonstrative tactics continue to be successful today.

In 2013, Western and African forces seeking to end the decades old campaign of human rights abuses and atrocities caused by Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in central Africa, began using aircraft in innovative ways to neutralise the LRA leadership, protect civilians, and promote defections, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of LRA fighters.<sup>131</sup> The LRA leadership was obsessed with the perceived surveillance capabilities of Western aircraft and coalition forces reinforced those perceptions with ground actions. In a tactic reminiscent of the RAF's 1920s doctrine, 'from the ground every

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<sup>127</sup> Orange, *Winged Promises*, pp. 73 – 74, in Jordan, flights were intentionally flown over recalcitrant tribes' camps 'to impress them', and to make a stronger point night flights were conducted in the same areas because 'aircraft flying at night leave a great impression on the Arab mind.'

<sup>128</sup> TNA AIR 23/23, *Memorandum from SSO Nasiriyah to AHQ Baghdad*, (18 Jan 1926); C.H.K. Edmonds, 'Air Strategy', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 69, no. 474, (May 1924), p. 193.

<sup>129</sup> TNA AIR 23/296, *SSO Reports Samawah*, (Dec 1924), describes the sheikhs coming to council with the SSO after being told how the RAF bombed other villages; TNA AIR 23/317, *Iraq SSO Reports*, (Apr 1924), describes the SSO flying to meet with the sheikhs, explaining the expectations and consequences.

<sup>130</sup> TNA AIR 23/298, *Telegrams between SSO and AHQ Baghdad*, (May 1925). When tribes refuse to move to where the government needs them to be, Flt Lt Moore threatens air action should they fail to comply. When the tribes refuse, the SSO requests demonstration flights and delivers a message that additional flights will be attack sorties. The tribes finally begin to move and the SSO remains overhead with the aircraft to observe the movement and remind the tribes of British willingness to bomb.

<sup>131</sup> US Department of State Fact Sheet, 'US Support to Regional Efforts to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army', (24 Mar 2014). Accessed at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/03/223844.htm> on 16 Jan 2015.

inhabitant is under the impression that the aeroplane is looking at them', aircraft of all sorts, whether dedicated ISR platforms or not, were used to harass and influence the LRA and their family groups living in inaccessible areas of the jungle by making them believe they were being actively hunted. The coalition forces commander noted that aircraft were used 'to make it uncomfortable to be in the LRA'. Aircraft overflights were used to force the LRA to continuously move their camps. Echoing the effects intended by the inverted blockades ninety years earlier, LRA defectors noted that harassing flights had caused such inconvenience among the women and children in the camps as to induce their male relatives to risk defecting.<sup>132</sup>

Air power doctrine of the inter-war period stated that strategy and tactics needed to be 'modified to meet the special conditions' of an adversary who 'seldom presents a suitable objective, and even if concentrated to oppose a land advance, the targets that they offer to air attack are comparatively small and fleeting'.<sup>133</sup> Sir John Slessor however, disagreed that there were no targets able to force a decision from the sheikhs. Echoing Callwell's guidance about placing what the guerrilla values most at risk, Slessor wrote that no matter where the tribesman, nomad, or villager was from, 'there are almost always some essentials without which he cannot maintain his livelihood; they differ greatly, but they are always there, and it is these things that Intelligence has got to know and tell the airman'.<sup>134</sup>

The SSOs and political officers, having developed the relationships and intuition needed to understand the people, the leaders, and decision-making processes, made it possible for Britain to integrate the RAF into its tribal control practices. The men on the ground

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with the commander of the anti-LRA coalition forces, Aug 2013 – May 2014, name withheld by request, telephone interview, 16 Jan 2015.

<sup>133</sup> *RAF War Manual, Part 1*, Chap XIV, para 21.

<sup>134</sup> Slessor, *Central Blue*, p. 65.

understood what the locals valued and were able to tell the airmen how best to put those essentials at risk in order to influence the local leaders.

## Conclusion

In Iraq, Transjordan, and Aden, the RAF SSOs became a necessary and normal element for integrating air control into the political, social, and technological environment of the empire, even to the point that senior officers in the theatre of operations would personally manage assignments of SSOs.<sup>135</sup> Prior to extending air control operations into Somaliland in 1930, the CAS noted, ‘the two most important factors in this connection are reliable SSOs, and intimate knowledge on the part of the air officers concerned of the conditions of the country and of the tribal and sub-tribal villages and grazing areas’.<sup>136</sup> The SSOs, that human element which shaped perceptions, built the intelligence ‘picture’ and managed the application of air power, formed the critical component of colonial policing by the RAF. And, like police forces everywhere, their goal was not to defeat an enemy combatant, but rather to control the local population, prevent trouble, achieve an acceptable level of stability, i.e., reduce raiding, feuding, and encroaching upon others’ grazing and watering areas, and to enforce the payment of taxes without inflaming passions and obscuring reason among the local populations.<sup>137</sup> After the First World War, the RAF embraced Britain’s constabulary tradition of coercing compliance from colonial subjects. The colonial goal did not change once Churchill substituted aircraft and SSOs for battalions of soldiers. With the air control scheme, the means of tribal control became air power, informed, managed, and integrated by acculturated airmen on the ground in many of the ‘wilder’ reaches of the empire.

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<sup>135</sup> TNA AIR 2/1196, *Letter from AVM Sir R. Brooke-Popham, Air HQ Iraq Command, to AVM C.L.N. Newall, Air Ministry*, (12 Feb 1930), p. 1.

<sup>136</sup> TNA AIR 9/18, *Somaliland Draft Substitution Scheme with covering note to CAS*, (Mar 1930), p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Portal, ‘Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire’, p. 350.

## Chapter Five

### Air Control and Its Influence

When assessing the importance of air control and its potential wider significance and relevance in the historiography of air power, it is necessary to look beyond the most common characterisation, that of aircraft bombing rash and unsophisticated nomads and villagers. *It is essential* to consider all the components that made air control work: aeroplanes, RAF armoured car companies, and indigenous forces, plus RAF SSOs or political officers integrating air power into the workings of tribal control.<sup>1</sup> All of these disparate components would have been useless however, had they been employed inappropriately or unwisely. The application of air power as it existed during the inter-war period required ‘targets’, and in the case of the colonies and mandated territories, targets came in the form of the tribes and peoples who were being controlled and influenced. As is often the case in irregular forms of conflict, the population was the battlespace where the fighting occurred and it was the people who provided the enemy fighting force—a hard lesson Britain drew from its experience trying to control Palestine from the air during the inter-war period.<sup>2</sup> In cases such as these, the population had to be influenced and its perceptions shaped. This chapter briefly considers the relevance of air control to influencing the people of the colonies and mandated territories, particularly the leaders at the local level—an important difference from the perspective air power theorists at the strategic levels have taken. The chapter concludes that air control moved from the relatively unsophisticated blunt instrument that many historians continue to portray it as to something rather more sophisticated and nuanced, particularly in its approach

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Omissi, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 60 – 82; Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 182 – 84; and Christopher Morris, ‘The RAF Armoured Car Companies in Iraq (Mostly), 1921 – 1947’, *Royal Air Force Historical Society Journal*, vol. 48, (21 Oct 2009), pp. 20 – 38.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap 3, ‘The Peculiar Case of Palestine’ for explanation.

to the population and its leadership, since this is echoed in much modern thinking on the subject.

The idea that the population is at the centre of the air control scheme echoes conventional modern wisdom that the primary objective and the focus of political, social, informational, and military efforts in irregular warfare is the people. This axiom is the essence of the population-centric model of irregular warfare.<sup>3</sup> The population-centric model though, needs balancing by a leadership-focused model, especially in tribal or clan-based cultures. It is a measure of air control's sophistication that this was a point the RAF fully recognised by the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> This often overlooked point, that the RAF was giving careful consideration to whom it influenced and how, rather than simply using bombardment as a means of coercing local populations or reactively punishing them for transgressions, further challenges the popular notion of air control as nothing more than a blunt, kinetic instrument.

As an example of current thought, Rupert Smith contends that the people are the battlefield, especially in what is increasingly an urban environment.<sup>5</sup> And, just as professional soldiers have traditionally studied geography in order that they might take maximum tactical advantage of the physical environment they are fighting on, it would seem logical that modern airmen should include anthropology in their studies in order to take maximum tactical advantage of the culture, history, traditions, faith, and societal norms that help define the psychological environment or cognitive domain.<sup>6</sup> The merits of this debate

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<sup>3</sup> One of the better examples of such emphasis on local engagement in order to achieve strategic results is found in a widely circulated and debated think piece by Major Jim Gant, US Army Special Forces, describing his team's efforts at tribal engagement in the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time*, (Los Angeles, CA: Nine Sisters Imports, Inc., 2009).

<sup>4</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control*, (Apr 1933), p. 11; and Rod Thornton, 'Countering Arab Insurgencies: The British Experience', *Dimensions of Counter-insurgency: Applying Experience to Practice*, Tim Benbow and Rod Thornton, eds., (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, (London: Penguin books, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Montgomery McFate, 'Anthropology and Counterinsurgency: The Strange Story of their Curious relationship', *Military Review*, vol. 85, (Mar-Apr 2005), pp. 25 – 38.



are beyond the scope of this thesis. What can be said, though, is that in recent years, the British and American militaries have re-discovered the metaphorical concept of human terrain as key terrain. The importance of culture, language, history, and societal norms as essential elements of successful military operations is not new. The RAF recognised this (as had the British Army before in its long tradition of imperial policing) and thus used SSOs in Iraq, Transjordan, and Aden to take full advantage of the human dimension during air control operations and then sought to apply those experiences in order to develop effective strategies to employ air power to achieve political/civil objectives in the frontier regions of the empire.

### **Gaining Control**

‘Air control’, as the term implies, was about compelling the frontier tribes to behave in a certain manner, in the early days, often due to the perceived threat of harm or loss – ‘in Frontier operations, as a rule our ultimate object is to control and pacify’. In order to control ‘barbarians’, coercive force, or more accurately, the threat of that force was the ‘stepping stone to control’.<sup>7</sup> As seen in preceding chapters, the RAF adopted a number of approaches to achieving ‘control’, methods which became more sophisticated over time. It is useful though, to place these developments into the context of how and why they achieved the degree of success they did.

In *The Mystique of Air Power*, Eliot Cohen observed that ‘force works by destroying or killing ... And fear of violent death only comes from the imminent possibility of the real thing’.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hobbes’ observation in *Leviathan*, that ‘The reputation of power is power’ because those who need protection are then drawn to the powerful, provided a basis for English political philosophy and insight into the use of power as a means of controlling the

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<sup>7</sup> F.S. Keen, ‘Gold Medal Prize Essay, 1922 – 23’, *Journal of the United Service Institute of India*, vol. 53, no. 233, (Oct 1923), p. 400.

<sup>8</sup> ‘The Mystique of U.S. Air Power’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 73. No. 1, Jan/Feb 1994. Found at [www.foreignaffairs.com/print/49442](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/49442), accessed on 20 Jan 2014.

populace.<sup>9</sup> Threats to life and property are made credible by previous applications of power. This then, highlights the dual nature of the air control scheme—it rested in both the physical and cognitive domains—a fact recognised by British political authorities and the military elements charged with policing the colonies and mandated territories. Air control methods used physical actions in order to influence the behaviour and shape the perceptions of indigenous groups, thus conditioning their thinking so that they were compelled to behave as the civil authorities wanted, rather than risk the consequences of acting as they wished.

The 1929 supplement to the *RAF War Manual* struck a coercive tone, stating that, ‘Air power ... attains its ends by virtue of the fact that the opponent does not know how far we are prepared to go’.<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on uncertainty is important to note because it reinforces the duality of air power’s coercive effects. An adversary must act to mitigate the destructive actions wrought by air forces and the adversary’s actions are shaped by the fear of what might happen by failing to comply with the coercer’s requirements. The 1929 supplement to the *War Manual* concluded the above statement by reminding airmen of the need to take ‘full advantage ... of this most influential factor of uncertainty’.<sup>11</sup>

Successful coercion requires the ability to predict what an adversary can do, but also to predict what they might choose to do, a point directly supported by Callwell’s emphasis on effective intelligence during irregular warfare.<sup>12</sup> Key to the enduring value of air power has been its ability to influence the behaviour of opponents, either by preventing or dissuading them from acting or by forcing an action by manipulating the costs and potential benefits.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the matter, forme and power of a commonwealth, ecclesiasticall and civil* [sic], (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1904), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum (ASM) 41, *Some Points on the Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, 1 Jan 1929, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, *Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 43 – 56.

The shortcoming, it seems, has been planners' perceived inclination to default to kinetic targeting.<sup>13</sup>

It is not unfair to suggest that the emphasis placed on coercion in the course of planning for and employing the air control scheme between the wars often tended towards kinetic targeting, i.e., where best to place the bomb in order to achieve the desired effect at the least cost to friendly forces.<sup>14</sup> Charges of excessive collateral damage during air operations and air power being 'too blunt an instrument' are not without merit given the often dominant emphasis on strike operations, especially during the *early part of* inter-war period.<sup>15</sup> The undue focus on kinetic effects usually meant that little attention was given to the ways in which air power could be used to shape perceptions and influence the targeted populations and their supporters through non-kinetic methods.

Andrew Lambert, in 'Air Power and Coercion', observed that if force was to be of utility in irregular warfare, it would be in a 'more subtle, and hence coercive, application'.<sup>16</sup> Reflecting others' observations about the difficulty of coercing irregular forces, Lambert suggested that because irregular adversaries may be comprised of a mix of insurgents, criminals, terrorists, opportunists, and unscrupulous sponsors, the challenge was to know who to target with available coercive means.<sup>17</sup> The target for coercive actions must be the one who has the authority to make decisions and the strength of position to lead the competing

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<sup>13</sup> Colin Gray, *Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Research Institute, Mar 2009), p. 59; Kevin Marsh, 'The Psychological Use of Air Power: A Growth Area for The Future', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, (Spring 2010); Octavian Manea, 'The Use of Air Power in Limited Wars: Interview with Professor Earl H. Tilford, Jr.', *Small Wars Journal*, (24 May 2011); and Mark Clodfelter, 'Forty-five Years of Frustration: America's Enduring Dilemma of Fighting Insurgents with Airpower', *Air & Space Power Journal*, vol. (Spring 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Karl Mueller, 'The Essence of Coercive Air Power: A Primer for Military Strategists', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Autumn 2001), p. 46; Colin Gray, *Understanding Airpower*, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Priya Satia, 'The Defense of Inhumanity: Air control and the British Idea of Arabia', *American Historical Review*, vol. 111, no. 1, (Feb 2006); and David Omissi, 'Technology and repression: Air control in Palestine, 1922 – 36', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4, (1990).

<sup>16</sup> A.P.N. Lambert, 'Air Power and Coercion', in *Air Power in its Wider Context*, Stuart Peach, ed., (London: The Stationary Office, 1998), p. 267.

<sup>17</sup> Lambert, 'Air Power and Coercion', p. 279.

movements to the desired outcome. Lambert labels those individuals the ‘true power brokers’. Only then, he says, is it possible to design and develop a leadership-centric influencing strategy, taking into account all the various complexities such as third-party considerations, public opinion, constituents and patrons, and future credibility, that will eventually persuade the leadership to accept the desired outcome.<sup>18</sup>

As Lambert noted, one of the major obstacles to effective coercion in an irregular warfare context is determining whom to coerce, that is, determining who the ‘true power broker’ is. Closely related to the issue of who or which group to influence is how to coerce, specifically discerning what is valuable enough to influence the adversary’s decisions and then holding what is valued at risk, a point made long before the inter-war period by Callwell in *Small Wars*.<sup>19</sup> Successful coercion, said Callwell, depended on understanding the adversary’s value system, and how the decision-making structure and authorities within a group affect the value structure. The goal, then, was to develop the knowledge of how to motivate and influence the groups’ decision-makers to act in ways that hopefully will achieve the desired results. This was the SSOs’ task—developing relationships with the tribes and villages in order to shape the behaviours and mould the attitudes in ways most beneficial to Britain’s colonial goals.

Karl Mueller, in *‘The Essence of Coercive Air power: A Primer for Military Strategists’*, noted that punishment might change the targeted group’s behaviour for a while, but it left their capabilities intact and failed to address the root causes of the behavioural problems, a point the RAF was not particularly interested in between the World Wars as evidenced by the writings that equated indigenous people with unruly children and bombings with spankings.<sup>20</sup> The other side of punishment, according to Mueller, was denial, making a particular course of

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<sup>18</sup> Lambert, ‘Air Power and Coercion’, p. 272.

<sup>19</sup> C.E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 40. This is a reprint of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, published in 1906. *Small Wars* was originally published in 1896.

<sup>20</sup> J.A. Chamier, ‘Air Control of Frontiers’, p. 403; Kingston-McCloughry, ‘Gordon-Shephard Essay’, p. 250.

action appear pointless as the means of changing behaviour.<sup>21</sup> The evidence that this was the approach adopted by the RAF is considerable, with the aim being that the application of air power would be so disruptive to the villagers that the leadership would eventually acquiesce to government demands after seeing ‘the futility of resistance’.<sup>22</sup> Because the British goal in the colonies and mandated territories was normally a civil policing one, inducing the local populations to comply with government demands rather than attacking the armed combatants, Mueller’s emphasis on denial versus destruction was fully in keeping with the British air control scheme. And, as British manuals and journals of the inter-war period noted, the people against whom air control methods were applied subsequently had to be governed.

So long as the tribes continue to raid and commit outrages in British territory... we are bound to punish and coerce them, but in our own interest it should be our policy to avoid any form of coercion that is likely to result in embittering the tribes against us, and anything that we can do to identify their interests with ours and to induce them to side with rather than against us will in the long run be very much to our advantage.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, punishment must be sufficient, but minimal.<sup>24</sup> Determining when the ‘moral objective’ had been achieved and thus the opportune point to suspend air actions, fell to the RAF SSOs who, by virtue of their ‘intimate knowledge of the enemy’ and with their ‘finger upon the pulse of the enemy’s nerves and morale’, allowed the RAF to achieve the results desired without creating ‘an attitude of sullen resignation’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mueller, ‘The Essence of Coercive Air Power’, p. 47. Lambert agrees: ‘Effective coercion is not about a fair fight. Too be successful, a coercer needs to demonstrate his asymmetry, both of power and invulnerability, to force the perceptions that he has the initiative, and that the opponent is utterly defenceless’, p. 276;

<sup>22</sup> TNA AIR 5/168, C.D. 21, *The power of the air force and the application of this power to hold and police Mesopotamia*, (Mar 1920), June 1921, p. 5. This emphasis on denial was a common theme during the inter-war period as indicated by its persistent emphasis in the manuals, journals, and speeches of the time: TNA AIR 8/34, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, (1 Aug 1924), pp. 4-5; TNA AIR 5/170, Air Staff Memorandum 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, (24 Mar 1930), pp. 11 – 13; TNA AIR 9/14, Air Staff Memorandum 20, *Lecture by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond to the students of the staff college, Quetta*, undated (circa 1923), p. 15; R.H. Peck, ‘Aircraft in Small Wars’, 1 Feb 1928, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 73, no. 491, (Aug 1928), p. 542; and J.C. Slessor, ‘The Development of the Royal Air Force’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 76, issue 502, (May 1931), p. 332.

<sup>23</sup> F.S. Keen, ‘Gold Medal Prize Essay, 1922 – 23’, p. 395.

<sup>24</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, *Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, p. 2.

Mueller's orientation of punishment and denial towards the enemy's will recognised the central role of the leaders who make choices for their groups. Punishment, according to Mueller, included the range of punitive measure that may be taken in response to adversary actions. Denial, on the other hand, was using the elements of power in a preventative manner to shape expectations and future actions. Punishment was reactive, after-the-fact, and tended to be less effective than denial strategies. Evidence shows that denial, actions specifically intended to convince the targeted group of the hopelessness of their cause, proved to be the more powerful influencing factor than threatening future punishment.<sup>26</sup>

Mueller offered a useful construct that illustrates how the air control method worked, breaking it down to the interplay between credibility, capability, and communication. Mueller called these elements the requirements for effective coercion.<sup>27</sup> (Figure 5.1) Threats carry weight only if the intended recipient believes the coercer possesses and will use whatever capabilities they might threaten to



**Figure 5.1,  
Credibility, Capability,  
& Communication**

employ. Between the wars, the RAF recognised that *credibility* was key to the application of air control methods—‘the most fundamentally important principle ... is that air power achieves its end by moral effect ... the aim of air action is the moral attack upon the nerves’.<sup>28</sup> Mueller noted that credibility existed in the opponent's mind and is established, as the RAF manuals from the inter-war period stated, that the efficacy of threats rested upon

<sup>26</sup> Mueller, ‘The Essence of Coercive Air Power’, p. 52. A sampling of reports from Iraq and the North-West Frontier of India support Mueller's claim. For example, TNA AIR 9/12, Air Staff Memorandum 52, *Air Control*, (Apr 1933), ‘submit out of sheer boredom and helplessness’, p. 13; TNA AIR 75/29, *The use of air power on the North west Frontier of India*, (May 1926), ‘realisation by tribesmen that ... air action has robbed him of his prized inaccessibility and limited his opportunities for hitting back’, p. 2; TNA AIR 75/27, *Effects of Air Blockade Measures on the Burhan Khel, Isa Khel and Safi during the recent MOHMAND operations*, (4 Oct 1935), ‘general feeling of insecurity...came to the position of feeling themselves absolutely unable to move in the open during daylight hours’, p. 5, and TNA CAB 24/195, CP 160 (28), *The Use of Air Power as Illustrated by the Recent Operations in Arabia*, (17 May 1928), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Mueller, ‘The Essence of Coercive Air Power’, pp. 49 – 50.

<sup>28</sup> C.D. 22, No. 805, *Operations Manual, Royal Air Force*, (London: Air Ministry, July 1922), pp. 128 – 29 and 133; TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 41, *Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, p. 1.

‘recognition by recalcitrant tribesmen of the fact that stronger measures are in reserve [available]’.<sup>29</sup>

Mueller’s second element, *capability*, referred to the ability to carry out the threat. It meant that the coercer had the physical and legal wherewithal to deliver the promised effects, whether kinetic or non-kinetic. Obvious limits on capability included geography, topography, and weather, and the technical aspects of weapons and delivery systems. Capability to deliver an effect might also depend upon legal, political, cultural, and ideological considerations. As this thesis has shown, the RAF, after establishing that it could effectively influence the behaviour of nomadic tribesmen in ‘wilder’ regions, was unable to achieve similar effects in urban areas or when constrained by legal and ethical restrictions.<sup>30</sup>

Although Mueller suggested that the third leg, *communication*, played a secondary role, in a conflict prevention scenario it may be successfully argued that communication is the most important of the three elements. In fact, this was exactly the point made by the airmen between the wars; in order to subdue a country one must first create the means of effective communications.<sup>31</sup> While Mueller was making his point from a modern perspective, during the inter-war period the RAF placed a special importance on the liaison function of the SSOs, ensuring local leaders received and fully understood what the British and colonial governments required: the timelines for compliance and the consequences of failing to meet the demands.<sup>32</sup> Where the air control scheme was successful, the RAF embedded SSOs, airmen who spoke the local languages and were immersed in the history, traditions, and

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<sup>29</sup> TNA AIR 8/34, *Air Staff Note on the Method of Employment of the Air Arm in Iraq*, p. 5. This sentiment carries through into TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, (July 1928), Chap 14.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 4, especially the discussion regarding air control operations in Palestine.

<sup>31</sup> Sir Claud W. Jacob, remarks after the presentation by R.A. Cochrane, ‘The Work of the Royal Air Force in Aden’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 76, no. 501, (Feb 1931), p. 102; and C.H.K. Edmonds, ‘Air Strategy’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 69, no. 474, (May 1924), p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> TNA AIR 9/14, Air Staff Memorandum 20, *Lecture by Air Marshal Sir J.M. Salmond to the students of the staff college, Quetta*, undated (circa 1923), p. 14; Martin Thomas, ‘Bedouin Tribes and the Imperial Intelligence Services in Syria, Iraq and Transjordan in the 1920s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 38, no. 4, (2003), p. 544.

cultures of the regions among the tribes to serve as acculturated liaisons from the government to the people.<sup>33</sup> The historiography indicates that the RAF was adamant and consistent that tribes and villagers would first be contacted to ensure they understood the government's requirements before any air actions were taken.<sup>34</sup> In the Middle East, the SSOs were normally the conduit for those communications, especially in areas that were too dangerous for the political officers, too distant from the political officers' offices, or too difficult to reach because of desert, mountains, or lack of roads. Sir John Slessor, at the time newly in command of 3 Wing in India, strongly made the point that the success of air control depended upon the airman's 'intimate understanding of the habits and mentality of the tribes', and the 'personal influence of the political officer'.<sup>35</sup>

Both Mueller and Lambert noted that the challenge was to convincing the opposition's leadership that acceding to government demands is a better course of action than resisting.<sup>36</sup> What made the denial strategy effective for the British between the wars was that the air control scheme was applied at the local level, where individual leaders could be identified by the SSOs or political officers, and then aerial effects developed (capability) and delivered (credibility) after informing the villagers of what was about to happen, why, and what it would take to avoid the punishment or receive the benefit (communication).

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<sup>33</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control*, pp. 10 - 11, 'The first condition of air control is intelligence and knowledge of the country ... The next condition is that political intelligence and knowledge of the inhabitants should be sufficient ... essential that we should know as much as possible about the habits and lives of the people'.

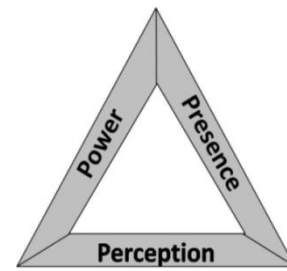
<sup>34</sup> TNA AIR 5/170, ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, p. 11; CAB 24/195, CP 160 (28), *The Use of Air Power as Illustrated by the Recent Operations in Arabia*, p. 3; and C.F.A. Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', 17 Feb 1937, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 82, no. 526, (May 1937), pp. 351 - 352. Oral histories collected at the Imperial War Museum in London from airmen who served in Iraq or on the NWF affirm the official positions laid out in the professional journals of the era.

<sup>35</sup> TNA AIR 75/29, *Letter from Slessor to Air Cdre Bertine Sutton*, Senior Air Staff Officer, HQ RAF India, (15 Apr 1935), pp. 1 - 2. Slessor makes the point that he had written such language into ASM 46, *Notes on Air Control of Undeveloped Countries*, (24 Mar 1930).

<sup>36</sup> Mueller, 'The Essence of Coercive Air Power', p. 51 and Lambert, 'Air Power and Coercion', p. 269.



Another way of looking at influencing effects in irregular warfare is as the interaction between power, presence, and perception.<sup>37</sup> (Figure 5.2) As Mueller and others noted, coercion is primarily about force or the threat of force used to influence the will or the decisions of an adversary leader. Each side in an irregular conflict has the power to influence the others' leadership, both directly and indirectly, and in the process, compel the other to act. In such a model, *power* is the range of civil, judicial, and military powers available to compel desired behaviours. It can be, and often is, comprised of both positive and negative incentives; fully in keeping with the theoretical constructs offered by Lambert and Mueller. *Presence* is usually established through demonstration of security, services, and programmes that affirm the coercer's power, but also serve to discredit opposing messages. As the epigram at the beginning of this thesis noted, the *perception* of presence may be enough to achieve desired changes in the behaviour of targeted peoples. Also included under perception is making adversary leaders believe the coercer can and will utilise all legal and ethical means at its disposal to achieve the desired outcomes. In some cases, such as when Glubb advised local sheikhs to report to the political officer and arrange to pay their taxes. When they refused to pay, he guided the aeroplanes to scatter the people and bomb the village, forcing the sheikhs to meet with the political officer and Iraqi officials.<sup>38</sup> One of the main points the RAF made about air control was that the strength of air power came from the fact that the opponent did not know how far the administration was prepared to go.<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 5.2,  
Power, Presence, &  
Perception**

<sup>37</sup> Richard D. Newton, 'Air Power, Coercion, and ... Irregular Warfare?', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, (Summer 2010), p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> IWM 4410, *Glubb Oral History*, reels 1 and 2.

<sup>39</sup> ASM 41, *Administration of Air Control in Undeveloped Countries*, p. 2.

## Applying Coercive Effects

There is no doubt that ‘boots on the ground’ were a critical requirement for successful control of the civilian populace at the local level, a point that airmen conceded at the beginning of the air control scheme.<sup>40</sup> Then, as now, a soldier or policeman patrolling a village provides a very potent deterrent force by operating in all three domains of coercion: demonstrating (communicating) the government’s power, providing a credible presence and assurance of the government’s commitment to security (credibility), and building the perception of the government’s eventual victory (capability). And, while the preventative-deterrent role is absolutely critical in the overall scheme to force local fighters to cease fighting and neutral civilians to support government policies and programs, influencing actions must be directed at the local leadership, either directly or indirectly, in order to induce changes in behaviour. As Callwell showed, this was a critical point recognised by the British long before the Wright brothers first took to the skies; that was then adapted and applied by the RAF in during inter-war period in order to implement the air control scheme.

This should be no surprise, since the cognitive effects of air power—operations in the moral domain—were integral to evolving RAF doctrine and policy between the World Wars. As early as 1916, Trenchard noted that, ‘The mere presence of a hostile machine in the air inspires those on the ground with exaggerated forebodings with regard to what the machine is capable of doing,’ demonstrating the importance placed on the psychological impact of air power, almost from the beginnings of military aviation.<sup>41</sup> The notion of irregulars’ inability to counter air strikes and their resulting sense of helplessness from being unable to fight back or defend against these measures came to be known to exert a significant preventative

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<sup>40</sup> LHA 15/3/134, *A Lecture on Air Control given by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff*, p. 2; also J.A. Chamier, ‘Operations in British Somaliland, 1920’, *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. 54, no. 234, (Jan 1924), p.

<sup>41</sup> H.S. Trenchard, *Paper on Future Policy in the Air*, (22 Sep 1916), accessed at [http://airpowerstudies.org.uk/library/historical\\_papers/Paper%20on%20Future%20Policy%20in%20the%20Air%20-Sept%201916.docx](http://airpowerstudies.org.uk/library/historical_papers/Paper%20on%20Future%20Policy%20in%20the%20Air%20-Sept%201916.docx), on 15 Feb 2015.

influence on enemy behaviour.<sup>42</sup> Glubb affirms this effect on tribal behaviour between the wars, noting that air power exerted its ‘tremendous moral effect’ by demoralising tribesmen with a ‘feeling of helplessness and [an] inability to reply effectively to the attack’.<sup>43</sup> The perception was achieved when the adversary leadership appreciated, or at least thought they understood, air power’s ability to restrict and counter their actions, force their leaders into difficult areas, limit communications, restrict movements, and change the leadership’s cost-benefit calculus when considering revolt versus compliance through techniques such as the inverted blockade, make life thoroughly miserable for all. Perception was further achieved when such actions convinced the populace that the government was able to effectively protect them from threats and intimidation, and, through the use of measures such as the provision of medical care and aeromedical evacuation, even in the most isolated areas, to improve their quality of life.<sup>44</sup> We must, of course, be careful not to compare life in the 1920s and 1930s with that today, but the general point of the government demonstrably improving the lot of the populace and thus being more acceptable is the one which matters here.

Air power thus had a significant ability to do as Callwell advised, put what insurgent leaders most value at risk: political status, power to control the people, and power to threaten the government, while placing the authorities in a position where they might challenge the narrative of the rebel leadership that they, not the government, offered the best option for the population. Influence, therefore, was sought upon the leadership who were of such importance in the uprisings and rebellions which air policing was used to deter, and, when required, defeat. T.E. Lawrence observed that, ‘Rebellions can be made by 2% active in a

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<sup>42</sup> AP 1300 (1928), chap. 14, para 53, ‘air bombardment, unlike military action, offers no opportunity to the enemy for profitable retaliation’ and air actions prevent ‘opportunities to the native of initial success and loot’.

<sup>43</sup> J.B. Glubb, ‘Air and ground forces in punitive expeditions’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute*, vol. 71, (Feb 1926), p. 782.

<sup>44</sup> Adrian Johnson, ‘Drones in the Service of Peace’; and Daniel Haulman, ‘Crisis in Iraq: Operation Provide Comfort’, in *Short of War: Major USAF Contingency Operations 1947 – 1997*, A. Timothy Warnock, ed., (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2000), p. 182.

striking force, and 98% passively sympathetic'.<sup>45</sup> According to Lambert, coercive force is effective only if what it targets can affect the outcome. The difficulty for colonial policing was first to understand the targeted group's decision making apparatus and, as Callwell, Marks, and others noted, determining what the leadership truly values. Lambert went on to add that effective coercion required 'an objective assessment of who are the true power brokers', the ones with the power to respond for and lead the group to desired behaviour.<sup>46</sup>

This, in many ways, was what the RAF did with air control. It was heavily based upon a leadership-focused strategy accomplished through a combination of both direct and indirect measures, most notably through the 'inverted blockade' described in Chapter Three above.<sup>47</sup> Although the methodology employed now appears excessive because of the effect on non-combatants, for that era it was an effective utilisation of air power for coercive purposes, seeking to influence leaders not only through direct effect upon them, but also through the influence their families and followers would bring to bear upon them as their quality of life was degraded over the course of the blockade. The awareness that the blockade would be lifted only upon compliance with the government's demands served as a powerful 'carrot' when measured against the 'stick' of inverted blockade. The arrival of doctors, veterinarians, political officers and administrators upon compliance served as a further demonstration of the benefits of ending insurrection, as well as serving as a possible reminder for the future as to the consequences of revolt.<sup>48</sup>

This is not to say that air power went unchallenged, bringing an end to the risk of revolt. Omissi pointed out that there was a continuous cycle of reaction and adaptation as targeted

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<sup>45</sup> Lawrence, *Evolution of a Revolt*, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, 'Air Power and Coercion', p. 279.

<sup>47</sup> Also see Sir John Slessor, *The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections*, (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', pp. 354, 357; and TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control, A Lecture by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff at the Imperial Defence College*, p. 15.

groups in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia became familiar with and adjusted their actions to minimise the strengths and exploit the limitations of the aircraft then employed.<sup>49</sup> His observation regarding action – reaction – adaptation has remained true. Yet air control demonstrated that the ability to insert troops and keep them resupplied without respect to ground transport and the attendant vulnerabilities to ambushes, mines, and choke points was an asymmetric advantage, albeit one provided by air mobility assets.<sup>50</sup> The British used their air transport advantage during tribal control operations on the North-West Frontier, dropping food, fodder, and ammunition to columns in the mountains in order to reduce the number of pack animals and also reduce the columns' vulnerabilities on ground lines of communication.<sup>51</sup> Although detailed examination is beyond the scope of this thesis, a cursory examination of the way in which air power was used in subsequent operations illustrates the point that the RAF's work anticipated later air power theory.<sup>52</sup>

One can see in RAF's operational reports, doctrinal manuals, and the professional journals from the inter-war period how denial and punishment were utilised to affect tribal leadership. As early as 1921, advocates for air control were stressing the importance of perception and credibility:

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<sup>49</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, pp. 116 – 121.

<sup>50</sup> A. Peck, *Air Force*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> T.R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849 – 1947*, (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1998), p. 167.

<sup>52</sup> See, for instance: Ian F.W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 103. This notes that after 1953 until the end of the Malayan Emergency in 1960 over 5,000 patients were evacuated and over 110,000 troops transported by helicopter; Sir Walter Walker, 'How Borneo Was Won', *The Round Table*, (Jan 1969), p. 21; Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era*, (Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 31, 'Helicopters and aircraft all proved invaluable in transporting supplies...each month we lifted an average of 19,000 troops, we air-landed an average of 1,900,000 lbs. of supplies, and we air-dropped an average of 2,000,000 lbs of supplies'. At the strategic level, see the use of air mobility during the Berlin Airlift, see Roger G Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948–1949* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), and in terms of influence, the use of air mobility for humanitarian purposes following the 2004 tsunami, for a snapshot, see Australian Defence Force activities for Operation Sumatra Assist are summarized at [www.defence.gov.au/optsunamiassist/](http://www.defence.gov.au/optsunamiassist/) ; US DoD efforts for Operation Unified Assistance are found at [www.defense.gov/home/features/tsunami/](http://www.defense.gov/home/features/tsunami/), while NATO's contribution of bridging equipment, delivered via air, can be found at [www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50070.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50070.htm). All accessed 12 Oct 2012.

To establish a tradition, therefore, which will prove effective...the Air Force must, if called upon to administer punishment, do it with all its might and in the proper manner. One objective must be selected—preferably the most inaccessible village of the most prominent tribe which it is desired to punish. ...The attack with bombs and machine guns must be relentless and unremitting and carried on continuously by day and night.... No news travels like bad news. The news of the punishment will spread like wildfire.<sup>53</sup>

By the 1930s, after more than a decade of air control experiences in multiple regions and in multiple ethnic settings, British doctrinal thought had evolved from the punishing effects possible through kinetic air power to one of persuasion, yet still backed up by the threat of force in order to ensure compliance with government demands, but primarily in a preventative/deterrence role.

Perhaps the simplest task of this kind which one may have to carry out is the restraint of the inhabitants of a certain territory without subsequent settlement and administration; that is to say, one may wish merely to prevent wild and undisciplined tribesmen from doing something which they ought not to do, such as raiding incursions into settled territory, robbing caravans, stirring up their neighbours or otherwise making a nuisance of themselves.<sup>54</sup>

Air operations during the inter-war period had a dual nature, primarily as a preventative influence on the decision-making apparatus of the tribes, but also a means of punishing those who failed to comply with government demands. The advocates for air power's efficacy in imperial policing articulated how the inherent attributes of air power, when appropriately applied offered the government asymmetric advantages to achieve its strategic goals. What most air power advocates and modern analysts have failed to explore are the conduits for communication between the colonial governments and the intended populations—the means of informing the people as to required standards of behaviour and the consequences of failing to comply with government demands. Air control and inverted blockades were not simply the use of aerial bombardment for the punishment of those on the receiving end. They were

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<sup>53</sup> J.A. Chamier, 'The Use of the Air Force for Replacing Military Garrisons', (12 Jan 1921), *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 66, no. 462, (May 1921), p. 210.

<sup>54</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, ASM 52, *Air Control*, p. 7.

the physical part of a sophisticated nexus of policing, with coercion – through the use or threat of force – as but one tool available to the authorities.

So, while air power offered the government considerable advantages, the ability to realise the desired outcomes depended in large measure (as it does today) on how effectively the government communicated with the population. And, while historians have tended to focus almost exclusively on the military aspects of air policing, particularly the use of bombing, what British colonial administrators discovered, first in Iraq and Transjordan, and then in other frontier regions of the empire, that with the correct enablers in place it was sometimes possible to effect political solutions with air power.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

Irregular warfare was and remains an inherently land-centric enterprise. And, despite those who advocate air power's ability to go-it-alone in irregular conflicts, Colin Gray has correctly noted that it is unlikely that air power will be a war-winner in irregular warfare. His is not an unreasonable proposition. To understand the RAF's colonial policing work though, it is useful to look beyond notions of air power as a 'war-winner'. Walter Boyne, in *The Influence of Air Power upon History*, observed that until recently, the influence of air power was 'far more important than any question of its decisiveness in battle'.<sup>56</sup> And it was in this arena, the difficult-to-measure aspects of the influence air power had upon the actions of local populations, where the RAF perhaps had the most effect. Because of the difficulties in measuring these effects, as well as the relative paucity of documentary evidence from the affected populations' perspectives by which to assess how influential air power was, it is perhaps inevitable that we have seen modern researchers and analysts emphasise bombing as

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<sup>55</sup> Vickery made the point that 'close and harmonious' relations between the military and political elements is crucial in the administration of the frontier regions, in 'Small Wars', *The Army Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 2, (1923), p. 310.

<sup>56</sup> Walter J. Boyne, *The Influence of Air Power upon History*, (New York: K.S. Giniger Co., 2003), p. 12.

though it was the entirety of the RAF effort in the colonial policing role, rather than just one part of it.

Air control offered Britain a means to establish and maintain acceptable levels of security and stability within the colonies and mandated territories, either through the actual or threatened use of force, or via persuasion—social, political, economic, and legal incentives, acting upon a targeted group's leadership directly or indirectly. It is the contention of this thesis that these persuasive aspects have not been given due consideration in many historical works, and the aim of this work has been to re-balance the historiography, offering new insights into the innovative way in which the RAF, and thus air power, made a much more sophisticated contribution to imperial policing than is normally presented.

As has been shown in this chapter, air power's ability to influence people on the ground was one of the primary features of air control. The air control scheme was predicated on air power's capacity to force compliance with colonial administrators' demands. The persuasive aspects of air power, though, where non-kinetic capabilities were used to achieve the desired effects without destroying or killing, are rarely mentioned by the RAF's critics.<sup>57</sup> This ignored the fact that by the end of the inter-war period the RAF recognised the need to balance coercive and persuasive means, and were intentionally incorporating non-lethal air operations into efforts to maintain control and keep the peace. The emphasis by most historians, theorists, and analysts has been squarely on bombardment, with minimal consideration given to what air power might achieve through means other than force. In irregular warfare, planners and politicians who fail to consider the influencing effects possible without bombing do so at their peril. This feature, wielding influence without causing harm, has been and will remain a critical requirement for irregular warfare.

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<sup>57</sup> TNA AIR 5/552, CID 150C, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, *The Air Force in Relation to the Army and Navy*, (28 Sep 1921), p. 5. The Army called air power used for colonial control 'an instrument of terrorism' which relied on 'bombing of women and children'.



## Chapter Six

### Conclusion: Air Power, Tribal Control, and Irregular Warfare

Circumstance had driven Britain to reduce its military expenditure, even in the face of new demands arising from the colonies and mandated territories.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, the implementation of the so-called ‘ten-year-rule’, saw a change in direction towards the vast territories the British had to control, with the application of air power becoming a critical element of attempting to maintain control without the need for large, expensive overseas garrisons of the sort which had characterised an earlier period of empire. As noted earlier, Peter Gray suggests there is a tendency to use history inappropriately.<sup>2</sup> Too often, historians looking at the RAF’s air control scheme in Iraq and the NWF during the inter-war period have done so through the lens of the modern era, applying legal and ethical constructs from the post-1945 period to the 1920s and 1930s. The RAF’s air control scheme must be examined in context and in a comprehensive manner. In order to make appropriate judgements about air control, one must look beyond the most common characterisation in many accounts, that of aircraft bombing unsophisticated nomads and villagers. It is essential to consider all the components that made air control work: aeroplanes, RAF armoured car companies, and indigenous forces, plus RAF SSOs or political officers integrating air power into the workings of tribal control.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> TNA CAB 23/23, *Conclusions of a conference of ministers*, 1 Dec 1920, p. 4; TNA CAB 23/23, *Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet*, 8 Dec 1920, p. 2, ‘...except with fresh Cabinet authority, schemes involving expenditure not yet in operation are to remain in abeyance ... the only method of effecting savings on a considerable scale is in the War Departments’. Also in CHAR 27/57, *Letter from Winston Churchill to the Prime Minister*, ‘Conclusions on the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s memorandum of 26 July 1919’, (9 Aug 1919).

<sup>2</sup> Peter W. Gray, ‘The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policing’, *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Summer 2001), p. 37

<sup>3</sup> David E. Omissi, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 60 – 82; Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 182 – 84; and Christopher Morris, ‘The RAF Armoured Car Companies in Iraq (Mostly), 1921 – 1947’, *Royal Air Force Historical Society Journal*, vol. 48, (21 Oct 2009), pp. 20 – 38.

The seductive allure of air power as a sterile, seemingly low-risk, and quick solution to modern warfare's complexity and messiness has been difficult for politicians to resist and has often been easy for airmen to advocate. The existence of the British air control scheme has not helped in this respect. Colin Gray, in *Understanding Airpower*, wrote, 'When politicians want to "do something"...airpower will usually be the first preference for US policy makers who feel the need to make a bold, hopefully decisive statement through action'.<sup>4</sup> And because politicians rarely 'do something' until after crisis occurs the theories, doctrines, and supporting historiography of counter-insurgency have been reactive rather than preventative. What has been missing is consideration of air power in a preventative role, providing the perception of governmental power, serving as a deterrent to lawlessness and subversion, and administering force only when required. In order to make Britain's air control scheme between the wars effective, 'some boots' were needed on the ground, acting as conduits for communication between the tribes and the government, developing relationships and maintaining situational awareness, and administering the programmes to influence behaviour and maintain the peace in remote regions of the colonies, protectorates, and mandated territories. The RAF SSOs, airmen on the ground and embedded among the local populace, who spoke the local language and fully understood the local culture, were the key to the RAF's successful policing efforts during the inter-war period.

For almost twenty years airmen and aeroplanes of the fledgling RAF showed they could maintain an acceptable level of control and stability in certain isolated reaches of the British Empire. The RAF's air control scheme from the inter-war period has assumed near-mythical qualities among modern air power enthusiasts advocating a pre-eminent role for air power in

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<sup>4</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Understanding Airpower: Bonfire of the Fallacies*, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Research Institute, Mar 2009), p. 50.

small wars.<sup>5</sup> As with most myths and legends, the air control myth has a basis in truth—the RAF did control troublesome native populations on the fringes of its empire using air power and Britain did reduce its cost of imperial policing by replacing army battalions with RAF squadrons. Decades of embellishment and countless interpretations of the air control story however, have created a perception of the past that exceeds the factual narrative. Those who cite scholarly works on the subject of air control by David Omissi, Philip Towle, Corum and Johnson, and Jafna Cox have tended to diminish the role the land elements played despite the fact that these scholars stress the critical role of police forces, native levies, and armoured cars.<sup>6</sup> What these scholars have not addressed has been the critical role played by the RAF SSOs in the Middle East and their legacy on other imperial frontiers.<sup>7</sup>

The RAF's air control story seems to maintain its enduring place of awe among airmen as evidenced by the student papers, journal articles, and Service studies that cite RAF operations in the Middle East between the World Wars as the example to which modern air power should aspire.<sup>8</sup> What the air-power-can-do-it-alone enthusiasts typically fail to address though, are those instances where the air control scheme had limited or mixed results, such as in the urban setting of Palestine and the mountains of the North-West Frontier. The caution,

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<sup>5</sup> Previously referenced articles such as Anna Mulrine, 'Warheads on Foreheads', Phillip Meilinger, 'COIN from Above', and Charles Dunlap, 'Air-Minded Considerations for Joint Counterinsurgency Doctrine', as well as service-sponsored studies such as John Murphy, *Air Policing*, Michael Longoria, *A Historical View of Air Policing Doctrine: Lessons from the British Experience Between the Wars, 1919 – 1939*, Carl H. Builder and Theodore W. Karasik, *Organizing, Training, and Equipping the Air Force for Crises and Lesser Conflicts*, indicate the bias of those who advocate for the 'air power can do it alone' position.

<sup>6</sup> David E. Omissi, *Air power and colonial control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 64 and 69; James S. Corum and Wray Johnson, *Airpower in Small Wars: Fighting Insurgents and Terrorists*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003), p. 56; and Jafna L. Cox, 'A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919 – 32' *Journal of imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1985), p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> Towle and Corum and Johnson do not mention the SSOs, and while Omissi, p. 157, and Jafna Cox, p. 167, do acknowledge them, it is only cursorily. Priya Satia's 4½ pages devoted to the SSOs characterised them as the enablers of terror and inhumanity, *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 254 – 58.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Builder's previously cited RAND study on CALCs; David Dean's, influential article (at least among American students), 'Air Power in Small Wars: the British air control experience', *Air University Review*, July/Aug 1983 makes no mention of ground forces or the SSOs. Peter W. Gray in 'The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policing', *Royal Air Force Air Power Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, (Summer 2001), p. 37, notes the unhealthy generalisations about the 'omnipotence of air power...that have been made in order to draw modern parallels where none exist'.

as Peter Gray advises, is to not let the myth so conceal the truth or let it become such a matter of faith as to ‘degenerate into a morass of dogma’ and in the process stifle necessary and healthy debate, which is what has often been the case.<sup>9</sup>

This thesis has taken a detailed look at the air control scheme from the 1920s and 30s. The research began by questioning what it was that made air control work. That original question was based on the assumption that imperial policing from the air was successful in achieving Britain’s strategic and operational objectives where it was applied. As was shown, air control was mostly, but not always successful. In urban areas such as Palestine, while air power demonstrated some ability to influence the behaviour of native populations, its overall utility was limited by physical, social, and ethical constraints. As was pointed out in Chapter Three, Trenchard rejected the suggestion that the RAF might be used against ‘civilised peoples’ and to control ‘industrial disturbances or risings in what may be called definitely settled countries’.<sup>10</sup> The substitution scheme was intended to police those regions where the Army had historically served in a frontier constabulary role. As was shown, British attitudes towards Arabia and Arabs during the inter-war period are an important contextual difference that must also be taken into account when considering air control methods then and now. RAF Historian Sebastian Ritchie explained that by 1928, RAF doctrine had been updated to reflect popular aversion to air power’s use in ‘civilised’ settings.<sup>11</sup>

Legal and political restrictions on using air power to prevent or control domestic situations during the inter-war period were to be expected, just as laws, conventions, and

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<sup>9</sup> Peter W. Gray, *The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policing*, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> TNA AIR 9/12, *Memorandum by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard on the subject of the use of aircraft in the case of industrial disturbances or risings in what may be called definitely settled countries such as India and Egypt*, (26 Apr 1920), pp. 1 – 2. Trenchard also resisted using the RAF during domestic labour strikes and in Ireland.

<sup>11</sup> TNA AIR 10/1911, AP 1300, (1928), Chap. XIV, para. 52. Sebastian Ritchie, from the RAF’s Air Historical Branch, wrote that parts of the 1928 RAF War Manual were written specifically with self-imposed limitations of air control in Palestine in mind. *The RAF, Small Wars and Insurgencies in the Middle East, 1919 – 1939*, (RAF High Wycombe, UK: HQ Air Command, 2011), p. 50.

rules of engagement limit the use of surveillance and applications of force today.<sup>12</sup> Between the wars, on the fringes of the empire though, and in areas that were at times labelled ‘wilder’, ‘uncivilised’, or ‘semi-civilised’ what little public outcry there was about using air forces to control troublesome native populations was ignored by most Britons. Much of the general apathy of the time might be attributed to legacy attitudes of the era towards native peoples, domestic social welfare programmes being more important to the common man than international challenges, or perhaps post-war disregard for minor foreign military ventures. No matter the reason, differences in cultural perspective do colour the historical context between then and now must be accounted for when attempting to glean appropriate lessons from the 1920’s air control scheme.<sup>13</sup>

During the course of refining the research for this thesis, it was necessary to go beyond the story of aeroplanes keeping desert guerrilla fighters in check or forcing civil compliance upon offending villagers. If the air control scheme ‘worked’, meaning it successfully maintained or restored stability in the colonies and mandated territories at an acceptable cost, what did Britain do to ensure the air control scheme achieved the effects required? The research led to the conclusions that Trenchard and the Air Staff fully understood Britain’s national objectives—reduce the war debt and maintain peace and stability in the empire at an acceptable cost. The Air Staff then translated those strategic goals into theatre campaigns using the doctrine, people, and equipment available at the time. It was a classic ends-ways-means approach to solving a strategic-level problem—police the imperial frontiers and do so ‘on the cheap’. Indicative of the economic impetus for the RAF air control scheme was Portal’s assessment of the British constabulary force in Aden. He noted,

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Domestic’ as it is used during the inter-war period went beyond the British Isles and acknowledged the elevated status given to ‘white’ colonies and the Dominions.

<sup>13</sup> Peter W. Gray, ‘The Myths of Air Control and the Realities of Imperial Policing’, p. 37. ‘The distaste, or embarrassment, felt by some authors over the Imperial aspects of the subject and the period does little to aid understanding’.

It [Aden] has practically no economic value...it supports an unexpectedly large primitive population ... There is nothing in the Aden Protectorate that justifies the expense, in money and life, entailed by military expeditions or occupation if the required standard of law and order can be maintained in any other way.<sup>14</sup>

By substituting ‘mechanical contrivances’ for manpower as WC 616A directed, the costs of imperial policing were reduced in some cases up to 90% by significantly reducing or eliminating the battalions deployed as frontier constabulary.<sup>15</sup> More importantly for British politicians, the number of British and native casualties suffered while administering punitive actions using the air control method, compared to earlier ‘Army methods’, were reduced to levels that were politically acceptable in post-war Britain.<sup>16</sup>

By the 1930s however, the RAF had concluded that the air control scheme needed to go beyond bombing and strafing and include indirect (non-kinetic) means to what had been heretofore a very kinetic methodology.<sup>17</sup> Portal’s discussion of how the air control method was applied during his tenure in Aden (Yemen) after more than a decade of RAF operations demonstrates the evolution of thinking about the role of air power in situations short of war and offers evidence that the British did understand the need for non-kinetic activities such as air transport, medical evacuation, and communications support (news, mail, and government officials) for isolated communities. Modern interpretations of Britain’s air control experience may have tended toward the kinetic aspects of air control, and especially how force and threats of force influenced local leaders, in large part because most archival sources focused

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<sup>14</sup> C.F.A. Portal, ‘Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire’, 17 Feb 1937, *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, vol. 82, no. 526, (May 1937), pp. 348 – 49.

<sup>15</sup> A.P.C. Hannay, ‘Empire Air Policy’, *The Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4, (Oct 1930), p. 643.

<sup>16</sup> A common theme within the professional journals between the wars was that the air control method produced fewer civilian casualties than the Army’s ‘burn and scuttle’ method, in large part by comparing the inverted blockade to the damage caused by an artillery barrage. See for example, Salmond (‘The Air Force in Iraq’), Glubb (‘Air and Ground Forces in Punitive Expeditions’), and R.H. Peck (‘Aircraft in Small Wars’), all previously cited in this thesis. Similar arguments have recently been made, comparing the civilian casualties from drones to those from ground combat. See for example, Mark Bowden, ‘The Killing Machines’, *The Atlantic*, (Sep 2013). Accessed at [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/09/the-killing-machines-how-to-think-about-drones/309434](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/09/the-killing-machines-how-to-think-about-drones/309434) on 14 Nov 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Portal, ‘Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire’, p. 356.

on kinetic applications of air power.<sup>18</sup> And, as David Jordan has noted, the use of transport aircraft for troop mobility and medical evacuation during the inter-war period has been ‘largely overlooked’.<sup>19</sup> Jordan’s conclusion is supported by the paucity of sources from the inter-war period which address air mobility operations or the details of intelligence integration. Therefore, it is fairly safe to conclude that the non-kinetic aspects of the air control scheme have been understudied by modern students due to lack of sources, which is a shame because the non-kinetic applications: mobility, reconnaissance and surveillance, and influencing operations, which made such valuable contributions to Western COIN operations after the Second World War have their roots in the inter-war period.<sup>20</sup>

Comparing punitive air operations of the last two decades with the RAF’s air policing operations makes for false analogies. From the narrow perspective of kinetic air operations, claims that nine decades of improved aerospace technology now makes it possible to hit targets more precisely, at night, and from stand-off distances are correct...but largely irrelevant in culturally and ideologically-driven conflicts dominated by interactions in the human domain that characterise modern irregular warfare.<sup>21</sup> A technologically-oriented approach misses the point that the RAF’s constabulary duties were intended to be an innovative means of ensuring colonial control among largely agrarian and pastoral populations in under-developed regions, at the local level...without having to apply force. Typical for constabulary operations, the British goal was to prevent rebellion by collecting information, representing British authority, and offering a conduit for communications so that

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<sup>18</sup> Colin Gray, *Understanding Air Power*, p. 50, noted that it was highly expedient to resort to kinetic airpower as the default option in irregular warfare situations.

<sup>19</sup> David Jordan, ‘Air and space warfare’, *Understanding Modern Warfare*, David Jordan, et al, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 210.

<sup>20</sup> David Jordan, in ‘Countering Insurgency from the Air: The Post-war Lessons’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 28, no. 1 (Apr 2007), p. 97, breaks air power’s roles in COIN into ‘mobility; observation; and presence, harassment, and delivery of direct force’. David Omissi makes a similar claim in the conclusion to *Air Power and colonial control*, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> Joint Doctrine Publication 04, *Understanding*, (Shrivenham, UK: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Dec 2010), p. 3-5. The human domain considers cultural, institutional, technological, and physical environments in order to provide appropriate context for developing understanding.

they did not have to drop bombs, destroy villages, or scatter flocks. This is largely impossible from an aeroplane overhead and so RAF SSOs were created to provide the connective link that made air control possible.

Policing, whether patrolling the streets of cities or among tribal villages, is an inherently personal activity, and the RAF realised personal relationships were impossible from the air. The very things that made aeroplanes such powerful weapons, speed and range, also prevented airmen from developing relationships with the people Britain sought to control. The SSOs though, because they were embedded with their hosts, were able to provide the necessary human interface. Community policing, where police constables are present among the people, walking the streets to build relationships, collecting information, and developing a sense of situational awareness, yields crime under control.<sup>22</sup> Imperial policing followed a similar theme.<sup>23</sup> As Salmond, Glubb, Portal, and other RAF airmen of the era explained, aeroplanes provided the power to punish and their presence overhead reinforced the perception that the British could go anywhere, see everything, and strike at will. What the research revealed though, was the absolute necessity of a human presence on the ground and among the populace, just as policemen are among the people in their precincts, to provide the crucial linkage between the people, the aircraft, and the decision makers.<sup>24</sup>

Between the wars, the RAF proved it could exert a powerful deterrent effect in many, but not all, regions of the empire. Over the course of the inter-war period the RAF learned

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<sup>22</sup> US Department of Justice reports and statistics, found at <http://cops.usdoj.gov>.

<sup>23</sup> An excellent discussion concerning the similarities and differences between community policing and counter-insurgency in an era of trans-national organised crime is provided by Detective 3<sup>rd</sup> Class John Zambri, a 25-year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department and also a Reserve Intelligence Officer, in 'Counterinsurgency and Community Policing: More Alike than Meets the Eye', *Small Wars Journal*, (8 July 2014), found at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/counterinsurgency-and-community-policing-more-alike-than-meets-the-eye>.

<sup>24</sup> The necessity and employment of SSOs is highlighted in the previous chapters, in AVM Dowding's report after the 1929 riots in Palestine (TNA CAB 53/20, COS 212), the Cairo Conference Report (TNA CAB 24/126, CP 3123), and AP 1300, Chap XIV (TNA AIR 10/1911). Priya Satia devoted five pages to 'The Human Face of Air Control?' in *Spies in Arabia*, pp. 254 – 58; Jafna Cox does give passing mention of the SSOs as collectors of information and then directing the aerial actions, p. 167.



that while the presence of aircraft overhead did influence native behaviours, without someone on the ground to manage the message, change was usually fleeting. People on the receiving end of air power's effects learned to adapt.<sup>25</sup> Longer term changes happened when and where the SSOs were placed among the tribes and villages. What the SSOs described in their reports, oral histories, and memoirs revealed that in those regions where the air control scheme was successful the SSOs served a preventative function. By communicating with community leaders, learning the local habits and customs, and building relationships with significant individuals they developed the ability to sense when something was amiss. Day to day, the SSOs' presence served as a stabilising influence among the tribes. And like policemen, they were able to apply appropriate kinetic or non-kinetic measures when and where needed to restore order quickly and with minimum casualties on either side.

Where air control was less successful, such as in Palestine and the NWF, there were no SSOs on the ground to provide the human interface between air power and the intended audience.<sup>26</sup> Where the air control method was most successful, there were 'some boots' on the ground maintaining situational awareness and providing a personal reminder that British authorities could and would use air power to punish should the locals fail to comply with political officer's requirements. By the end of the era the SSOs were using air power as a calmativ tool, maintaining order by threats of force, but also bringing the 'benefits of civilisation' to the frontier inhabitants.<sup>27</sup>

Martin Thomas' analysis of air control between the wars revealed that success was 'less a matter of repressive policing [punitive air operations] than penetrating nomad society to secure the cooperation of clan leaders' and was based upon the officers' abilities to forge

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<sup>25</sup> James S. Corum, 'The Myth of Air Control: Reassessing History', *Aerospace Power Journal*, vol. 13, no. 4, (Winter 2000), p. 71. 'Air control may not have won the good will of various native peoples, but it did a pretty effective job of keeping many of them in line—at least for a time'.

<sup>26</sup> TNA AIR 9/19, *Notes on the Future Garrison of Palestine*, p. 1; also AVM Dowding's report (TNA CAB 53/20, COS 212).

<sup>27</sup> Portal, 'Air Force Co-operation in Policing the Empire', p. 348 and p. 356.

working relationships in their assigned communities [preventing misbehaviour].<sup>28</sup> That thread has not been fully explored by those comparing air policing then and now. Those who have considered the role of the airman on the ground during recent air operations have limited their consideration to the smallest part of what the SSOs did, directing and controlling aerial attacks.

Between the wars, aeroplanes and armoured cars usually did the things they were designed to do: strike targets when necessary, reconnoitre and map large areas, transport people and supplies where they were needed, and provide visible evidence of the government's ability to go where it wished whenever it chose. Modern manned and unmanned aircraft will continue to do what aircraft do—strike, reconnoitre, transport, and influence. But the challenge for air forces looking to be ready for the next, most likely irregular, conflict is to restore the air power expert on the ground, a regionally acculturated, embedded specialist who is able to provide the human interface at the local level using the capabilities of modern air power as an effective deterrent to conflict. And, should violence break out, that airman is then able to bring those asymmetric capabilities to bear to restore the peace at the least cost.

As was noted earlier, there were no SSOs in the RAF before 1920. Many of the airmen recruited to be SSOs during the inter-war period began as pilots or observers who happened to speak Arabic.<sup>29</sup> The RAF planned a two-year program of study of the people, language and country in order attain a realistic level of qualification.<sup>30</sup> The Treasury would not allow the Air Ministry to form an intelligence branch after the war, so intelligence functions were

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Official RAF history, found at [www.raf.mod.uk/rafrement/squadrons/iisqnhistory.cfm](http://www.raf.mod.uk/rafrement/squadrons/iisqnhistory.cfm).

<sup>30</sup> TNA AIR 2/1196, *future organisation of intelligence in Iraq*, (15 Nov 1926), p. 1.

performed by pilots from the General Duties Branch serving ground tours.<sup>31</sup> This is an important point because like the Army SSOs before them, the RAF SSOs were operators first who were absorbed into the intelligence structure.<sup>32</sup> Service as an intelligence officer was generally disdained among pilots who had joined the Air Force to fly, and so the RAF intentionally incentivised the airmen by adding marks to their Staff College examination, providing an advantage during promotion consideration for having a second language, offering flying opportunities at nearby air stations, and providing a cash allowance for horse and groom, house-boy, and interpreter.<sup>33</sup>

‘An adequate intelligence organisation is an important factor in the general scheme of air control...it is necessary to maintain a constant flow of officers with a knowledge of Middle Eastern languages and experience of intelligence work... On the conclusion of training officers will be posted for a further two years’ duty as intelligence officers in Iraq, Aden, Palestine, Transjordan or the Sudan... Officers who have rendered satisfactory service in intelligence duties will receive special consideration when selection of officers to undergo the Staff College Course’.<sup>34</sup>

As the need for local intelligence was greater than the pool of available RAF personnel with the desired language and foreign area skills could provide, the RAF looked to ex-Army officers who had served with the Indian Army before the war or with Allenby’s Egyptian Expeditionary Force.<sup>35</sup> The Army candidates had the needed language, cultural, and interpersonal experiences, plus they understood the military’s role in a frontier constabulary, so the Army transfers only needed to learn the application of air power, substituting air

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<sup>31</sup> Nicholas John Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media: The Official History of the United Kingdom’s D-Notice System*, (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), p. 124; and Heinz Duthel, *Global Secret and Intelligence Service III*, (Raleigh, NC: Lulu.com, 2008), p. 205. ‘Officers have been employed in intelligence duties since 1918. At the time, officers of the General Duties Branch (mainly pilots on a ground tour or who could no longer fly) performed the duty of Squadron Intelligence Officer, or aircrew on ground tours in the Air Ministry Intelligence Department. By the late 1930s there was a dedicated Intelligence Branch’.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, the appointments of Lt Col Lionel Vivian Bond (7 Mar 1930) and Lt Col Thomas D. Daly (19 Mar 1932) in *The Times*. Bond, like Glubb, was a combat engineer, and Daly was an infantry officer before serving as RAF SSOs.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Role of Special Service Officers in the Air Intelligence Organization’, *Royal Air Force Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 1, (Jan 1931), pp. 53 – 55.

<sup>34</sup> *Flight*, (26 Aug 1932), p. 811.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, p. 182.

actions for punitive expeditions, in the various frontier environments. In order to provide the human element necessary to facilitate and enhance the planning and employment of air power in modern conflicts, future SSOs will need to balance tactical and technical skills with ‘softer’ skills such as language expertise, cultural acumen, negotiation, and mediation.

There is no question that air power offers powerful contributions in an irregular conflict environment, whether that be in the era of air control, or today – for example Al Qaeda’s anti-surveillance memorandum found in Timbuktu, Mali, offered powerful proof of air power’s coercive effects.<sup>36</sup> Among the tactics recommended to counter the West’s surveillance and targeting advantages were avoiding the use of permanent headquarters, hiding under trees, staying in the shadows, using dolls and statues as decoys, and avoiding large gatherings in open areas. Omissi’s comment about familiarity with aircraft leading to the targeted people developing ‘unforeseen powers of adaptation and resistance’ notwithstanding, the evidence indicates that aircraft overhead do make things difficult for irregulars on the ground.<sup>37</sup> The nature of modern adaption and resistance has a familiar air to anyone cognisant of the original air control schemes. The capability of modern airborne sensors has been widely publicised in the news, demonstrated on television and in movies, and discussed via the internet. It is still therefore reasonable for insurgents, rebels, terrorists, and criminals to assume that when an aircraft is seen or heard overhead, it really could be looking for or at them—just as the epigram on page 1, quoting the RAF Operations Manual from 1922 noted. Perception has become a matter of fact, whether evidenced by al Qaeda’s anti-surveillance tips to the jihadists in Mali, the British use of Leigh Lights against Greek insurgents, and the El Salvadorans’ use of AC-47 gunships circling and dropping flares to break up FMLN formations. Aircraft overhead with the potential to deliver lethal force do influence the behaviour of an intended group—whether bombs are dropped or not. Whether

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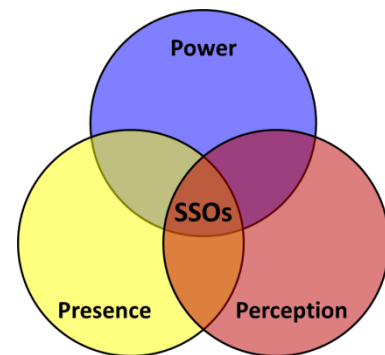
<sup>36</sup> Associated Press, [http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/\\_international/\\_pdfs/al-qaida-papers-drones.pdf](http://hosted.ap.org/specials/interactives/_international/_pdfs/al-qaida-papers-drones.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Omissi, *Air power and colonial control*, p. 113.

air power is the sole, primary, or a contributing element of the proposed solution to a problem will depend upon what end results are desired, the design of the operation, and the resources available. But the origins of these facets of air power in irregular warfare can clearly be traced to the inter-war era and the air control scheme.

As Lawrence pointed out and Trenchard conceded, air power in a leading role will not be successful in every situation. Where air control was tactically successful between the wars, aeroplanes, ground forces, and embedded, acculturated airmen combined to achieve Britain's campaign objectives on the ground. Even when all British and Indian battalions had been withdrawn, there were still 'boots on the ground'. As the research revealed, those 'boots' were a critical element of the air control scheme.

Whether RAF armoured cars, native levies, or police forces cooperating with the aircraft overhead, the lesson that should be taken from this experience is that it was the



**Figure 6.1,  
SSOs in the Centre**

correct boots on the ground that made the RAF's air control scheme 'work'. The SSOs were the enablers of the Power – Presence – Perception model (Figure 6.1), serving as the critical linkage between the locals and the government, managing the application of kinetic and non-kinetic power, and shaping local perceptions of air power's capabilities in order to maintain peace and stability.

The lesson that should be taken from the RAF's air control scheme is not that aeroplanes could bomb 'semi-civilised' irregulars into submission. That is a superficial view. Air power's effectiveness and its value was directly related to how well the planners and decision makers understood the motivations and needs of people at the local level, what sorts of actions will influence local leaders into acting favourably towards government requirements, and developing effective means to create the conduits that allow clear and direct

communication among decision makers in order to prevent conflict. There is abundant evidence that the RAF's air control scheme did just that.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

This thesis has examined the proposition seemingly presented by the general understanding of the British air control scheme that air power can replace land power in conflicts of an irregular character. Many of the airmen, scholars, and politicians who have advocated such a position in recent years have pointed to the RAF's successful experiences policing the frontiers of the empire between the World Wars as evidence of air power's efficacy, relative low cost, and political convenience in 'small wars'. This is misleading, since as the thesis has shown. In certain cases, the RAF successfully did replace Army battalions policing the frontiers of the empire. But it was also true that air control methods had their limits, as Lawrence and Slessor cautioned and the case studies of air control in Palestine and on the NWF showed.

This thesis proposes that it was the RAF SSOs in the Middle East who were the key to Britain learning how to integrate air power with local political objectives, as shown by the way in which the RAF integrated its people, processes, and equipment in pursuit of its objectives in the colonies and mandated territories. These specialist airmen, embedded in the local villages in a manner likely impossible today because of political, cultural, and security reasons, served as liaisons from the authorities, developed a level of cultural acuity and native communication that approached what Priya Satia equated to intuition, and performed a critical air-land integration function that enabled the effective employment of air power in some very irregular contexts.

In conclusion then, while Britain's air control scheme in the Middle East during the inter-war period might be dismissed by some modern commentators as archaic, overly harsh,

politically unacceptable, and perhaps even illegitimate, the fact remains that Churchill and Trenchard's air control scheme gave the British government what it needed at the time: an acceptable level of colonial stability for relatively low financial and personnel costs.

Whereas policing the empire likely ensured the RAF remained a separate Service, equal to the Army and the Royal Navy, it failed to prove that air power could be decisive in conflicts of an irregular nature. What the RAF's air control experience did show, however, was that air power made a difference. Air power, even with the fragile machines of the 1920s and 1930s, offered an unprecedented level of mobility, reconnaissance, and firepower that permitted the British to reduce the size of its imperial garrisons, by up to 90% in some cases. More importantly, the air control 'experiment' showed later generations how air forces might offer counter-insurgent forces an asymmetric advantage in what is decidedly political warfare.

What has largely been missed by generations of air power analysts is the contribution of the RAF's SSOs to the effective application of air power in irregular warfare. By focusing on aeroplanes and technology, most analysts have missed the key innovation that 'made air control work'. Future airmen would do well to re-examine how British airmen of the 1920s developed and used their deep understanding of the people and the social, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions to collect and provide localised qualitative intelligence and targeting recommendations, in co-ordination with civilian colonial administrators that was critical to achieving the administration's desired effects. It was airmen on the ground who made the air control scheme work, serving as the 'eyes and ears' of the civilian administration in areas too dangerous or isolated for political officials and bringing the appropriate elements of air power to bear when and where needed.

What the RAF accomplished between the World Wars should not be dismissed. Sir Michael Howard reminds us that 'wars still resemble each other more than they resemble any

other human activity', thus the air control experience from between the wars can inform air power thinking and how air power might offer planners and politicians an asymmetric advantage during conflicts of an irregular nature; but it is vital that the complexities and nuances of the original air control scheme are understood if this is to hold true. The limitations of the scheme, especially as seen in Palestine, must be appreciated and acknowledged just as much as the successes. Nonetheless, the air control experience showed air power as a more subtle and nuanced tool, rather than the blunt instrument some commentators have suggested. Where subtle and nuanced air power was effective, embedded acculturated airmen, i.e., the '*right* boots on the ground', proved to be the key element of success. It is perhaps time that greater consideration were given by historians to this wide-ranging and important part the RAF's air control scheme has played in the evolution of air power theory, and to the level of relative sophistication it displayed.



## **APPENDIX 1**

Amyas E. Borton commanded the RAF/RFC in the Palestine brigade from 1917. He returned to the Middle East as the Officer Commanding the Mesopotamian Group, renamed the Iraq Group, in 1921. When the RAF assumed responsibility for imperial policing in Iraq in Oct 1922, Borton continued as the operational commander of the RAF forces until returning to England in 1923 and becoming the second Commandant of the RAF College at Cranwell.

Sir (John) Adrian Chamier served as a staff officer and deputy director in the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence from 1919 – 1923. He was one of Trenchard's early 'English Merchants', helping to defend and advocate for an independent air force. From 1923 – 27, he was a staff officer at HQ RAF in India. After retirement from the RAF in 1929, he served as Secretary of the Air League and helped to promote air-mindedness through his writing and public speaking. In 1939, he was recalled to service and in 1941 accepted the position as Commandant of the newly formed Air Training Corps, earning the title, 'Father of the ATC'.

The Honourable Sir Ralph Cochrane served as a flight commander in 45 Sqn in Iraq under Arthur Harris. He commanded 8 Sqn in Aden in 1929. During the Second World War he commanded Nos. 3, 5, and 7 Gps of Bomber Command. In 1945 he was appointed head of Transport Command

Sir Arthur Coningham commanded 55 Sqn in Iraq, was on the staff of HQ RAF Middle East, and served as the senior airman for the Sudan Defence Force. During the Second World War he commanded 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force.

Sir (Ernest) Leslie Gossage was a senior air staff officer at RAF Iraq Command in 1934 and was the air officer commanding for British forces in Aden from 1935 – 36. From 1940 to 1944 he served as commander-in-chief of Balloon Command.

Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris commanded 31 Sqn on the NW Frontier and 45 Sqn in Iraq under Sir John Salmond. From 1938 – 1939 he was the AOC in Palestine and Transjordan. Harris commanded Bomber Command from 1942 – 1945.

Edgar J. Kingston-McCloughry was assigned to the staff in RAF India from 1929 and made a flight commander in 20 Sqn (Army Co-operation) on the NW Frontier in 1932. He was a prolific writer on air power during the inter-war years. In 1942, he commanded 44 Gp (Ferry Service) and from Dec 1943 was the chief operational planner for the allied expeditionary air force for Operation Overlord (D-Day, Allies' invasion at Normandy).

Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt was the air officer commanding in Iraq from 1930 – 32. From Feb 1933 to Jan 1935 he served as the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff. He commanded Bomber Command from 1937 to 1940 when he was replaced by Sir C.F.A. Portal. From 1940 – 45 he was the inspector-general of the RAF.

Sir Richard H. Peck commanded 84 Sqn in Iraq in 1924. During the Second World War served as the Director-General of Operations and Assistant Chief of the Air Staff. While serving the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence, along with Chamier and Slessor, he

was one of Trenchard's 'English Merchants', writing and speaking to advance the cause of independent air power.

Sir (Henry) Robert Brooke-Popham served as air officer commanding in Iraq from 1928 – 30. In 1940 he was appointed commander-in-chief Far East.

Viscount Portal commanded British forces in Aden from 1934 – 36. From Apr – Oct 1940 he commanded Bomber Command. In October 1940 he succeeded Sir Cyril Newall as Chief of the Air Staff, a post he held until December 1945.

Sir (William) Geoffrey Salmond commanded the Middle East brigade of the RFC from July 1916 – Aug 1917. In Dec 1917 he assumed command of Middle East Command and remained there until 1922. In Dec 1926 he was given command of RAF India and was responsible for the RAF's successful evacuation of Kabul in 1928 – 29. On 1 Apr 1933, he was appointed Chief of the Air Staff but died of cancer shortly thereafter.

Sir John Salmond became the first RAF officer to command all British forces in Iraq on Oct 1922. He was the first airman to serve as a joint force commander (modern term) in a theatre of operations. In 1929, he succeeded Trenchard as the Chief of the Air Staff.

Sir Robert Saundby was a flight commander in 45 Sqn under Arthur Harris and in 1925 he commanded the RAF Flight in Aden. At the beginning of the Second World War he was the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Operational Requirements and Tactics). In 1943 he became Harris' deputy at Bomber Command.

Sir John C. Slessor commanded 3 Wing in Waziristan. He served in the Directorate of Operations and Intelligence with R.H. Peck from 1928 – 30. In 1943, he became commander of Coastal Command. In 1943, he commanded Coastal Command and in 1944 he replaced Sir Arthur Tedder as the commander of the RAF in the Mediterranean and Middle East. In 1950, he succeeded Tedder as Chief of the Air Staff.

James M. Spaight was a lawyer with the civil service who specialised in the law of air war. His writings served to establish parallels between lawful uses of force on land and sea with the new realm of aerial warfare. He concluded it was permissible to attack certain targets to cause civilian hardship and war weariness in order to create a desire to surrender. Spaight served in the Air Ministry from 1918 – 1937.

Sir Geoffrey William Tuttle was an engineering (aircraft maintenance) officer in Karachi, now Pakistan, from 1932 – 35, and then served as a flight commander in 5 (Army Cooperation) Sqn in Waziristan from 1935 – 37. In 1944 he was appointed the air officer commanding of Air Headquarters Greece.

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AIR 20, Air Historical Branch Papers

AIR 23, Overseas Commands

AIR 75, Papers of MRAF Sir John Slessor

CAB 23, First World War and Interwar Conclusions

CAB 24, First World War and Interwar Memoranda

CAB 37, Cabinet Committee Papers

CAB 53, Committee of Imperial Defence, Chiefs of Staff Committee

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CO 732, Middle East Original Correspondence

CO 733, Palestine Original Correspondence

CO 831, Transjordan Original Correspondence

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